

JOB AND HIS FRIENDS

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PREFACE

THIS little book has been expanded from four lectures delivered some years ago before the Vacation Term for Biblical Study. At the time there was no thought of publication, and they have been considerably modified, largely by the inclusion of passages from the Book of Job itself. In chapters I and II the Authorized Version has been closely followed; in later chapters I have ventured to offer an independent rendering, occasionally noting variations from the traditional Hebrew text, and sometimes quoting the Septuagint (the 'Egyptian tradition') when that version has been preferred.

The reader may feel there is little in these pages that may be called new; still less can it be claimed that the book offers a complete discussion of *Job and his Friends*. But it goes out with the hope that it may induce others seriously to study a work which, old as it is, may yet claim a very high position indeed among the world's literary masterpieces. Even more valuable is the place it holds in the long development through which man has learnt, and is still learning, to understand the ways of God and His dealings with humanity.

Finally I must offer my grateful thanks, first to the Student Christian Movement Press, and then to my wife, who has once more given me invaluable help in reading the proofs.

THEODORE H. ROBINSON

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I

INTRODUCTION

ANY list of the great literary products of the world would place the Book of Job very high, and not a few would give it the first position of all. There may be others which appeal to us more for one quality or another, but when we look at the work as a whole, and take into account all those factors which go to make fine literature, we shall find few if any which can claim equality with this ancient poem.

What, then, are the qualities for which we look? They must surely include beauty of language and dignity of expression. The noblest of thoughts and the grandest of conceptions will appear banal if the form in which they are presented is commonplace. Language and style may, indeed, be simple; the most striking and impressive sentences sometimes consist of a few ordinary words. It is one of the marks of the great poet that he can convey so much in common language. They must, it is true, have a music of their own, but only the highest art can select and arrange words in such a fashion as to create the right impression. On the one hand we may have the polysyllabic speech of Aeschylus or Pindar, and on the other such lines as Wordsworth's

Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face.

There is a music here which suggests far more than the individual words can impart, and the ability to feel and transmit that music is one of the qualities indispensable to the literary artist.

But the finest of language will fail unless it arises from an intense sincerity. The poet, or indeed the writer of first-class prose, must be convinced of the truth which he expresses. More, we must get the sense that he is speaking because he cannot help it. There is an inner urge which has proved irresistible, and the real man has to pour himself out, lay bare his very soul regardless of pecking daws.

This sincerity is possible only to a man of profound thought and superb courage. He will be satisfied with nothing that is merely superficial. Faced with an experience which would reduce a lesser mind to helpless bewilderment, he insists on probing it to its depth. Confronted with a problem, he will refuse an easy or an imperfect solution, even though it may have been accepted by generations of his ancestors and by all his contemporaries. The effort to reach the truth may mean a break with all conventions, a shattering of the foundations on which his own thought-life has been built, but he will not shrink even from that prospect. Like Socrates, he will follow the 'argument' wherever it may lead him.

Added to this we look for a sense of humour. That does not simply mean being 'funny'; it is rather a deep emotional sense of an incongruity. It is not simply the intellectual faculty of wit, for it demands insight into reality, an ability to see below the surface of life and experience, and to penetrate nearer to ultimate truth. It is here that some of our greatest English poets are deficient; Milton and Wordsworth are outstanding, almost classical, examples.

Humour is not always a pleasant thing, for it may be very grim; Dante sometimes startles us with his sudden perception of the contrast between things as they are and things as they appear to be.

The last feature which we may notice here is the choice of an adequate theme. The great tragedians of Greece dealt ostensibly with incidents in legend or even history, but as we read them we know that they are simply using these as examples of general experience. They set before us the inexorable laws of personality, of character, working out destiny in certain circumstances and with a certain background; even Indian philosophy is hardly stricter than Aeschylus in applying the law of *karma*. In the more serious Roman poets, Lucretius and Virgil, we have a sense of universal human fate, faced by the one with clear-sighted courage, and felt by the other with a haunting sense of doom. Poets like Dante, Milton, and Goethe set before them the deep things of the relation between God and man. No beauty of language, sincerity, or humour can make great poetry of an insignificant subject. The work may live because of other qualities, but it will live as a thing of the second rank, and never attain the great heights.

How does the Book of Job respond to these tests? Let us look at a couple of passages as they stand in the Authorized Version. We may take, almost at random, 6.15-21:

My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook,
And as the stream of brooks they pass away;
Which are blackish by reason of the ice,
And wherein the snow is hid:
What time they wax warm, they vanish:

When it is hot, they are consumed out of their place.
The paths of their way are turned aside;
They go to nothing, and perish.
The troops of Tema looked,
The companies of Sheba waited for them.
They were confounded because they had hoped;
They came thither, and were ashamed.
For now ye are nothing;
Ye see my casting down, and are afraid.

Could we have had a better picture of the friend who has failed? Every traveller in the desert knew the rushing torrent of the *wadi*, its violence while the stream lasted, and the despair of people who hoped later to quench their thirst from its waters.

Or again, 38.2-11 (God is speaking):

Who is this that darkeneth counsel
By words without knowledge?
Gird up now thy loins like a man;
For I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.
Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the
earth?
Declare, if thou hast understanding.
Who hath laid the measure thereof, if thou knowest?
Or who hath stretched the line upon it?
Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened?
Or who laid the corner-stones thereof;
When the morning stars sang together,
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?
Or who shut up the sea with doors,
When it brake forth as if it had issued from the womb?

When I made the cloud the garment thereof,
And thick darkness a swaddling-band for it,
And brake up for it my decreed place,
And set bars and doors,
And said:
Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further:
And here shall thy proud waves be stayed.

Even in English this is magnificent, but any translation can be but a pale reflection of the Hebrew. For one thing, Hebrew is even more strongly accented than English, and it is on such a point as this that a language depends for the impressiveness of its poetic sounds. There is, too, a rhythm which is much more regular than the version, though there is sufficient variation to prevent monotony. Another feature of Hebrew which greatly adds to its stately dignity is to be found in the small number of adjectives which it employs. There is no adjective in either of the two passages quoted; there is none in Psalm 23 ('green pastures' is literally 'pastures of verdure', and 'still waters' 'waters of rest'). We note, further, that every verse is divided into two parts, equal in Hebrew, though this cannot be adequately represented in English. In most lines the second part repeats or echoes the sense of the first, and forms a kind of 'parallel' to it. This 'parallelism' is a rhythm of *thought*, and is the essential element in Hebrew poetic form; the rhythm of sound is incidental and is due to the nature of the Hebrew language. If we depended on sound only, it would be possible to 'scan' Hebrew prose as effectively as Hebrew poetry.

The poet can create an atmosphere; so we read of a supernatural revelation in 4.12-16:

Now a thing was secretly brought to me,
And mine ear received a little thereof.
In thoughts from the visions of the night,
When deep sleep falleth on men,
Fear came upon me, and trembling,
Which made all my bones to shake.
Then a spirit passed before my face;
The hair of my flesh stood up :
It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof :
An image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and
I heard a voice.

Is it possible to read a passage like this, even though it is only a translation, without a sweeping sense of awe?

Or we may turn to the utterance of passionate emotion in ch. 19; we may look at the closing verses of that great cry, vv. 17-24 :

My breath is strange to my wife,
Though I entreated for the children's sake of mine
own body.
Yea, young children despised me;
I arose, and they spake against me.
All my inward friends abhorred me :
And those whom I loved are turned against me.
My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh,
And I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.
Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my
friends;
For the hand of God hath touched me.
Why do ye persecute me as God,
And are not satisfied with my flesh?

Oh that my words were now written!
Oh that they were printed in a book!
That they were graven with an iron pen,
And lead in the rock for ever!

Only once in our records of spiritual experience have we a more poignant anguish of loneliness.

One striking feature of this book can hardly be appreciated in translation. That is the richness of the vocabulary. The Hebrew words in our Bible are far from exhausting the number in common use when the books were written. Every new inscription brings us one or more words which are not found in the Old Testament. In Job we have a large number which do not occur elsewhere. One of the difficulties the student has to face in reading the book is the number of times he has to refer to his lexicon for words he has not previously met, and we are still uncertain as to the exact meaning of some. But when the poem was first written, it must have been most impressive.

Seldom if ever has the world seen any literature more obviously stamped with sincerity than the Book of Job. The poem gives us an insight into the furthest recesses of the writer's heart. This is not mere exhibitionism; Job has no thought of his audience. He is not trying to shock them, still less to appeal to their sympathy; after the opening speeches he knows that such an appeal would be useless. He has suffered as no other ever has within his knowledge, and his troubles are not solely or even mainly due to the physical misfortunes which have fallen upon him. He has lost everything, property, children, social position, health, and only so much actual life is left to him as will enable him to feel his misery. But worse than all that is the

spiritual problem which faces him. His faith in the God whom he has tried to serve has been shattered, and the friends have done nothing to restore it. On the contrary, every word they say tends to make him feel more and more oppressively the weight of the question for which neither he nor they can find an answer.

In such a case a man might well abandon himself to blank despair, surrender his right and responsibility for a reasonable faith, and take the advice offered by his wife: 'Curse God and die.' But this he will not do. True, some of his language looks blasphemous to the casual reader, but that apparent impiety springs from a deep-seated conviction that there must be some solution to his problem, some answer to his question. He must search and search until he finds it, even though the quest ends in his final and utter ruin. So in 13.13-15 he cries:

Hold your peace, let me alone, that I may speak,
And let come on me what will.
I take my flesh in my teeth,
And put my life in my hand.
Though he slay me, yet will I wait for him:
But I will maintain mine own ways before him.¹

Truth at all costs; nothing less will satisfy Job, and these verses are typical of Job's attitude throughout the poem.

A stark passion for truth at all costs, such as that which urged Job on his quest, is certain, sooner or later, to expose the incongruities of life, in other words to touch his sense of humour. From time to time we get flashes of it clearly

¹ The R.V. is certainly more correct than the A.V. in the first line of v. 15; in the first line of v. 14 the word 'Wherefore' is most probably a copyist's error. Job is making a statement, not answering a question.

expressed, as when Job asks why God shall take all this trouble to torment him, 7.17-18:

What is man that thou shouldest magnify him?
And that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?
And that thou shouldest visit him every morning,
And try him every moment?

This is an obvious parody on Ps.8.4, where the endless watchfulness of God is evidence of the divine care and high estimate of human nature.

But there is far more than this. All through the poem runs the conflict between God as men imagine Him, and God as He really is, between the God of popular theology, and the God of ultimate goodness as Job knows He must be. It is this feeling of the contradiction which we gather Job has never realized before, which gives the whole poem its high emotional tension, and helps to make it what it is, one of the greatest pieces of literature.

What of the theme? It is the gravest problem which can face a man who holds that the universe is made and ruled by a God who is at once all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good. We call it the problem of suffering, but it is rather one special aspect of suffering that is involved. It is not the practical problem of how to escape from suffering. One of the world's great religions is an attempt to solve that question, and does it by admitting that personal existence is inextricably bound up with pain, and that release is to be found only in the extinction of individuality. It is the much more terrible problem of reconciling two beliefs which seem to man's limited intelligence to be mutually exclusive. In pre-Christian days it could have arisen no-

where but in Israel, but there it was bound to arise. Elsewhere the fundamental hypothesis of moral omnipotence was not recognized, and there could be no problem. Suffering, it is true, exists, but there are many explanations of it, and to a mind brought up in an atmosphere of animism or of polytheism, the question is simplicity itself. The trouble is due to one or another of the countless superhuman beings which men recognize; some of them are definitely malignant, and nearly all are capricious.

Israel had learned to think differently. Even though the existence of other gods might be admitted (as it seems to have been down to the time of the exile), the Hebrew prophet claimed that Yahweh was the only fit object of worship for His people. Further, He was the creator and master of the universe; every other deity was subordinate to Him. He controlled all events, even those which appeared to have little bearing on the fortunes of His own people. And, at some period not later than the exile, there emerged a pure Monotheism, and the gods of the nations were seen to be, not merely inferior beings, 'godlings', but actually non-existent. They were minus quantities, 'less than nothing', and Yahweh was the one living and true God.

But the doctrine of the Hebrew prophets went further. Yahweh was essentially *good*, a being who was Himself righteous and just, demanding a high standard of ethical conduct from His worshippers. He was a God of principle, unlike the whimsical and uncertain deities of other cults. If the term omnipotent were applied to Him, it was always on the understanding that He would and could do nothing inconsistent with His own character as revealed to men. The gods of the nations had their likes and dislikes, but

there was always the possibility that the unforeseen would happen. Among men there were specialists in the ways of the gods, priests and diviners, but there was always a chance that their calculations would give the wrong result, for any particular deity might choose to act in a new way, or demand a new method of approach from his worshippers.

Now among the principles which were laid down by Yahweh was that of punishment. If a man did wrong, either to his fellows or to Yahweh Himself, he was sure to suffer for it. This was sometimes interpreted as the vindictive reaction of offended authority, but more characteristically as the working out of the deed itself. A man committed an act, and so released forces in the world which must sooner or later come back to the doer with intensified force. It is true, not merely that sin will be found out; that would be bad enough. But still worse is the fact that the sin will find the sinner out, and the divine punishment consists in the fact that Yahweh delivers the wrong-doer 'into the hand of his sin'. Hence retribution is inevitable, and every sinner is laying up for himself a store of suffering from which there is no escape, and the only way to mitigate it is to admit the sin, abandon it, and seek to live in accordance with the will of Yahweh.

Some types of suffering, then, were easily understood. But there were others which could not so readily be fitted into the scheme of things as presented by an ethical monotheism, and these raised a problem. Such a problem is the result of conflict between accepted theory and fact, and may occur in any realm of thought. In natural science, for example, there are certain principles which are generally recognized as describing the normal behaviour of matter, living or dead; we call them, for the sake of convenience,

laws. If a well-attested fact emerges which is inconsistent with a 'law', a problem arises, and the scientist has to choose between two courses. Either he can abandon or modify the 'law', or his researches may lead him to the discovery of a fact hitherto unknown, which will resolve the difficulty, and bring the obtrusive fact within the range of the 'law'. A striking illustration may be taken from the history of astronomy. Herschel's discovery of the planet Uranus was made by observation through the telescope. Its course was duly plotted in accordance with the Newtonian 'law' of gravitation, but as time passed it became clear that Uranus was not exactly following the path which the 'law' prescribed for it. Either the 'law' must be abandoned in its existing form, or the astronomer must discover a new fact which would account for the abnormal behaviour of the planet. Two mathematicians, one English and the other French, independently guessed at the existence of a planet still farther from the sun, whose attraction was causing the aberration in the path of Uranus. By purely mathematical processes they worked out the main relevant details of such a planet, its distances from the sun, its mass, the period of its revolution, and its path, and then called on astronomical observers to verify their conclusions. The result was not merely the vindication of the 'law' but the discovery of a major planet whose existence had been hitherto unsuspected by man.

A serious thinker in philosophy or theology must proceed along similar lines. He forms his hypothesis on the basis of observed facts or well-attested historical events, and is entitled to assume its accuracy until he is confronted with a new fact or event which appears inconsistent with it.

Then, like the student of natural science, he must either

abandon his hypothesis as it stands or discover some new fact which will resolve the apparent discord and strengthen his faith in his hypothesis. Neither the scientist nor the theologian is, as a rule, willing to surrender a hypothesis which has been long tested and has elsewhere been found adequate. His efforts are directed at research which may give fresh knowledge, either of the physical world or of the ways of God with men.

Now, as we have seen, Israel had learnt to adopt a certain hypothesis of the relations between herself and Yahweh, and in time came to apply it to all dealings of God with man. But there was (and is) one stupendous fact of experience which seems inconsistent with the theory. Men must suffer from their sin; that is a natural and inevitable deduction from belief in a righteous and even a loving God. But so much of this world's pain falls upon people who have not sinned, or who, at least, have not sinned in a manner at all commensurate with the suffering they have had to endure. Righteousness is no protection against earthquake, flood, or other natural disaster. In every social or international upheaval great numbers of people, including infants, have to suffer through wrongdoing in which they have had no share. We know these things to be actual fact, and from time to time they are brought home to us by experience. So it was with Job; he was, among his contemporaries, conspicuous by his 'integrity'. He was 'perfect', and there was no point in his character or conduct to which blame could be attached or for which punishment was justified. Yet he suffered beyond all others; why?

The poet of Job was not the first to seek an answer to such a question. It arose in the last days of the Judæan

kingdom, possibly through the death of Josiah. Here was a man praised by the historian for his piety and loved by the prophet for his simple humility, and he had met his fate at the hands of a king who was seeking world-empire. In face of this disaster Jeremiah cried (12.1):

Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee :
Yet let me talk with thee of thy judgements :
Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?
Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?

Jeremiah had no answer, indeed, he seems to have abandoned the search for one, for he was immediately confronted with the knowledge that his own family was plotting against him. But his contemporary, Habakkuk, was able to think more deeply on the problem (Hab. 1.13):

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil,
And canst not look on iniquity :
Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously,
And holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth
the man that is more righteous than he?

He did succeed in getting light on the problem in a vision granted to him, when he heard Yahweh say (2.4):

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him :
But the just shall live by his faith.

In other words, the real punishment of sin lies in the

spiritual damage which it does, the sinner's innermost being is warped and distorted. On the other hand the righteous man lives in the full sense of the term, through his fidelity. Because he remains constant to his conception of righteousness through all experience of suffering, he becomes and remains a real and true person.

Such a solution, however, could not be final; men inevitably ask for greater clarity and a more obvious justification of the ways of God. Some went so far as to deny the reality or the permanence of unmerited suffering. So the writer of Ps. 37, who began :

Fret not thyself because of evil-doers,
Neither be thou envious against the workers of
iniquity
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb. (vv. 1-2).

Later he continues (vv. 9-11) :

For evil-doers shall be cut off :
But those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit
the earth.
For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be :
Yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it
shall not be.
But the meek shall inherit the earth :
And shall delight themselves in the abundance of
peace.

This is a very comforting doctrine, and there may have been stages in the growth of society when it held good.

But is it true generally? Does the honest pauper always become a millionaire? Or the successful profiteer always perish in a garret? We must look further.

Another Psalmist, to whom we owe Ps. 49, found comfort in the thought that the wealthy could not enjoy their gains after death. He seems to have had some glimmering of a life beyond the grave in which the relative positions of the rich and the poor are reversed. Unfortunately, as comparison of the A.V. with the R.V. suggests, both interpretation and text are uncertain in the crucial verses 14 and 15, and other phrases in the poem remind us of Ecclesiastes. But it is clear that this Psalmist believed that no man could reap permanent benefit from ill-gotten gains.

There is one outstanding figure in the Old Testament whose experience throws light on the great problem. In Isa. 52.13-53.12 we have a picture of an ideal Servant of the Lord. The essence of his qualification lies in the fact that he has poured himself out for death (or, perhaps, laid himself bare to death) (53.12). He is thus fully surrendered to God and the work God has laid upon him. His service has brought him sickness; his disease (53.3, 4) is disfiguring (52.14), compels him to wear a mask (53.3b should be rendered 'as one who hid the face from us'), brings him into contempt and cuts him out of the census lists (53.3c)—all this would fit a leper and no one else. He has suffered, too, from persecution (surely this is an element drawn from another historic figure?) and perished by judicial murder. Yet he has done no wrong to God or man. On the contrary, his very sufferings have been redemptive, even vicarious (53.5), and he ever made, and makes, intercession for transgressors (53.12). His own reaction to his fate is

given to us in 53.11 (the familiar versions are quite inadequate to represent the Hebrew):

Out of the agony of his soul
He shall see light,
Shall be satisfied by his knowledge.
My servant, the Righteous, shall make many righteous,
And their iniquities he, and no other, shall bear.

Wholly surrendered, he asks and expects nothing for himself. All he wants is that others shall win forgiveness and life through his pain. Knowing that they have won what he sought to give them, he is satisfied, even in the utter extremity of suffering. He has all he wanted; there are no complaints.

Such a position may settle the matter from the sufferer's point of view. He, at least, has found a meaning in pain. No innocent suffering is wasted; it all has a purpose, and that purpose is the redemption and the rectification of those who are round him and will come after him. All is well with him, but does such a solution justify God? Has even He the right to demand such sacrifice? Christian experience can answer with a confident affirmative. It is true that in a measure this prophecy may be 'fulfilled' in every surrendered Servant of the Lord, but only One has completely satisfied the conditions. It is because the sufferer is divine, the Word which was God made flesh, very God of very God, that He Himself can satisfy that demand for justice which He makes, and which He implants in the hearts of men. But when the Book of Job was written, centuries were still to pass before the full meaning of redemptive suffering was demonstrated to the world in the Cross.

One other great soul faced the problem in Old Testament times, and won his way to a new faith. This was the writer of Ps. 73. Like Job, he had seen and felt the incongruity of theory and fact. He had been tempted to abandon his basic hypothesis, and to say that goodness was a failure. But he saw in time that this surrender to evil would be an act of treachery, not only to God, but also to others who shared his service and his struggles. He sought refuge in 'the sanctuary of God', and his experience there led him along much the same path as that which Job trod in the quest of enlightenment. We may have occasion to refer to this poet again.

Before we come to look at the book itself, there is one point which we must not overlook. The whole drama of the relations between God and man must be played out on the stage of this life. Death is the end, not merely of physical existence, but of communion between Yahweh and His people. The ancient Hebrew did not contemplate absolute extinction, either by absorption into a universal entity or by simple annihilation. In earlier days he had thought of the dead as continuing in some way their existence in the grave. Ruth, taking a solemn oath not to leave Naomi, says (Ruth 1.17): 'Where thou diest, will I die, and there also will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if even¹ death part thee and me.' When David is told of his child's death he says (II Sam. 12.23): 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.' And Rachel, in her tomb at Ramah, centuries after her death is heard weeping for her murdered children (Jer. 31.15).

From the tomb people might be called back to communicate with the living. The classical instance in the Old

¹ EVV are inaccurate here.

Testament is the story told in I Sam. 28. Saul, in his last despair, consults a 'witch', a priestess of the cult of the dead, what we should now call a 'medium', and she brings up Samuel from his rest in the grave. He speaks to Saul and tells him (v. 19): 'To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me.' The cult of the dead was, of course, a dangerous form of apostasy, and the orthodox belief was that after death men went to a great underground country named Sheol, a land from which there was no return. We have several fine descriptions of what might be expected there; one of the best is in Job 3, and we have another in Isaiah 14. But, whether in the tomb or in Sheol, man had no more communication with God. 'The grave cannot praise thee,' says Hezekiah (Is. 38.18), and similar phases are not uncommon in the Psalms. If wrong is to be righted, it must be done while man still lives on earth.

II

THE BOOK

PRACTICALLY all that has been said up to the present has referred to the poetical portion of the book of Job. That is obviously the important part; it is there that the great problem is faced and discussed. It is to its language that we appeal when we maintain the unique character and value of the work as a whole. But that poem has a setting; we are given the situation in which the problem arose, and the background against which all discussion must be read and studied. At once the question springs to our minds: Are the setting and the poem the work of the same writer? Or has the poet taken some other source from which to draw his picture of his hero's sufferings?

The background consists of an introduction and a conclusion, occupying chs. 1, 2, and 42.7-17. We are at once struck by the fact that these portions are in prose, while the rest of the book is in verse. This in itself is not enough to determine a difference in authorship; it is quite possible that a great poet should write a prose narrative as well as a fairly long poem. But there are other distinctions to which modern study of the book has called attention. Some of these are matters of simple language, others are questions of style, others deal with the thought of the book, or with its more subtle psychological qualities. Before we

pass to closer study of the poem itself, it would be well to sketch some of the points which have led many scholars to doubt unity of authorship.

The first detail that catches our attention is the use of divine names. In thirty-seven chapters of verse the familiar 'Yaweh' occurs six times; in all but one it appears in announcing God as a speaker, and 12.9 is the only place where it is found in the actual dialogue. On the other hand, in the 'framework' (fifty-five verses in all) it is used twenty-six times. The equally familiar word for God, the plural form 'Elohim', occurs only six times in the poem (three of those in passages which some scholars ascribe to other authors, though not on this ground), and eleven times in chs. 1-2. In the poem two words are commonly employed. One is the form 'Eloah', a singular formed from the normal plural; this occurs some forty times in the poem, and only about fourteen in the rest of the Bible. The other word is 'Shaddai', stated in Ex. 6.3 to have been the name by which God made Himself known to the Patriarchs. Even so, it appears only seventeen times outside the Book of Job, and there it appears in some thirty places. It might be argued that this choice of names is deliberate; the author meant to exhibit Job as a non-Israelite, and was careful to make the friends Edomites. Therefore it would be improper for either to use the name which should be confined to the God of Israel. Even Edomites, until the Maccabaeen period, were outside the Covenant people, and it would be, in a sense, profanation for them to take the name Yahweh on their lips. The author might, however, well use the name in his narrative, since he regarded Yahweh as the supreme or only God. Though if that is the reason the writer has made one slip, for he

puts the name Yahweh into the mouth of Job twice in 1.21.

Striking as these figures are, they do not form the only contrast between the two elements in the book. Job's reaction to his sufferings is quite different. It is difficult to imagine the speaker in the poetic dialogue saying 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' (1.21), or 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil' (2.10). The whole conception of piety in the framework is humble and unquestioning submission to omnipotence. That view might satisfy the friends in the poem, but it is certainly not the attitude of Job. Nor should we gather that the friends had taken the position ascribed to them by the poet if we had only the condemnation passed on them by Yahweh in 42.7. It is even harder to reconcile the divine answer to Job, as it stands in chs. 38ff., with the unqualified approval expressed in 42.7-9.

What is Job's disease? In 2.7 it is described simply as boils. But the symptoms suggested in the poem, e.g. in 7.4-5; 14-15, seem to indicate leprosy of a peculiarly severe form. The word 'boil' could be used in this connection, as it is in the medical passages of Leviticus, e.g. 13.18-23. There is here, then, no necessary contradiction, though it is difficult to see why the story-teller did not give the reader clearer indication of the terrible disease.

Other points of difference will occur to the reader as he studies the text closely. Here let it suffice to remark on that which, to some students, constitutes the strongest piece of evidence against unity of authorship. This is the tone and atmosphere which pervade the two parts. The framework is a story, well told, and presented in a fashion which

commands our sympathy for the sufferer. But it is told from the outside; the writer is an observer of an experience which he has not himself undergone.

The poet, on the other hand, speaks out of the bitterness of his soul. We feel that the spiritual struggles which he records, perhaps even the physical suffering he describes, can be nothing but his own experience. There is a poignancy of anguish, most of all spiritual anguish, which is wholly absent from the prose framework. The poem, unlike the prose, is inscribed with the heart's blood of the writer; the man who speaks there could not have taken the purely objective attitude of the narrator.

Yet there is no doubt that the prose and the poem are closely linked together. Ezekiel refers to a certain Job (14.14, 20) who is classed with Daniel and Noah as a perfectly righteous man. For a number of reasons it seems impossible to place this poem as early as the beginning of the sixth century B.C., and it seems clear that this Job was a familiar figure of tradition or of legend. The framework may well have been taken from this popular story, which shewed how a man could maintain the right attitude to God in spite of the most terrible disasters. There was certainly a dialogue between Job and the friends, though it must have been very different from that which the book now contains. But the events recorded in the framework are assumed as the background of the present dialogue, though once or twice the poet slips and forgets details; e.g. in 19.17 Job's children seem to be still alive. What the poet has done is to take this story, and to insert his own poem in place of the original discussion. So every part falls into its proper perspective and we can consider it practically as a whole.

There are two or three other passages about which scholars are doubtful. In ch. 28 we have a panegyric on Wisdom, in itself a magnificent piece of poetry, but with little or no relevance to the rest of the poem. It stands between the actual debate and the great appeal made by Job at the end, and it is hardly in keeping either with the attitude of Job or with that of his friends. But we should be sorry to have lost it. We have passages like vv. 7-8.

There is a path which no fowl knoweth,
And which the vulture's eye hath not seen :
The lion's whelps have not trodden it,
Nor the fierce lion passed by it.

Or vv. 12ff. :

But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Man knoweth not the price thereof;
Neither is it found in the land of the living.
The depth saith, It is not in me :
And the sea saith, It is not with me.
It cannot be gotten for gold,
Neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.

Or the great conclusion in vv. 26-28 :

When he made a decree for the rain
And a way for the lightning of the thunder :
Then did he see it and declare it;
He prepared it, yea, and searched it out.
And unto man he said,
Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom ;
And to depart from evil is understanding.

Even if this is no part of the original poem, it stands on the same level, alike for thought and for expression.

The dialogue between Job and the three friends closes with Job's great 'oath of purgation' and appeal to God to appear and state His case, ch. 31. But before the divine self-revelation in ch. 38 onwards another speaker intervenes. His name is Elihu; he is not mentioned earlier, and he states that he is younger than any of the other four. Yet he condemns them all for their failure to reach the proper conclusion. Job deserves his anger, because he has made himself out to be more righteous than God, and the friends have earned his wrath because they had not condemned Job or given an answer to him—a rather curious reading of their speeches. He declares that modesty has kept him silent till the other three had no more to say, but the ordinary reader will hardly admit his claim to that virtue. He reminds us of Zophar, but is even more self-assertive and dogmatic. Perhaps his arrogance reaches its height in 33.7:

Behold my terror shall not make thee afraid,
Neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee.

Great as he is, Job must not be afraid of him, for he can be merciful as well as strong!

And what has Elihu to say after all this? Simply what the friends have already said. He speaks of a dream-vision (33.15); so also had Eliphaz. He insists that God is always righteous, e.g. in 34.10-12:

Far be it from God that he should do wickedness;
And from the Almighty, that he should commit
iniquity.

For the work of a man shall he render unto him,
And cause every man to find according to his ways.
Yea, surely God will not do wickedly,
Neither will the Almighty pervert judgement.

Is not this the burden of Bildad's speeches? And have not the others taken exactly the same line?

There is, then, a very strong feeling that this speech, or rather these speeches, must be ascribed to a later poet of great ability, though he did not reach the height of the original writer. It is difficult to see why he was not mentioned in the first place; though the old story knew only the three, there was no reason why the poet should not have included the fourth character whom he was to introduce. Others have suggested that Elihu was due to a revision by the poet himself, who felt that there was still more to say when in later years he came to read over what he had written. But in that case why could he not have expanded one or more of the speeches he has already put into the mouths of the friends? In any case, we shall best appreciate the whole poem if we read ch. 38 directly after 31.

One other section has been challenged by a number of scholars. It occurs in the speeches of God at the end of the book. Among the wonders of creation are mentioned two great creatures, the hippopotamus (40.15-24) and the crocodile (41). The descriptions of these creatures are longer than those of other works of God, and some readers sense a slight change of style. It must be admitted that 40.14 would make a better conclusion to the divine speech than 41.34, but the reasons against including these passages in the original work are by no means so strong as the objections to the Elihu section.

These are cases where some scholars suspect additions, but in one place it has been suggested, with good grounds, that there has been an accidental omission, with some slight modification of the surviving text. The part of the book concerned comes at the end of the debate. The plan followed up to this point is to allow each of the friends to speak, and to give Job an answer. There have been two 'rounds' and Eliphaz has started a third. Job replies to him in chs. 23, 24, but the third speech of Bildad occupies only five verses (ch. 25). This is unlike Bildad, and the answer which Job gives in 26 is equally unlike Job. Indeed, 26.2 would follow naturally on 25.6, and it is suspected in some quarters that 26.1 ('Then Job answered and said') is no part of the original text, and that Job's real reply to Bildad begins with ch. 27. Vv. 2-12 are quite in character, and v. 6 seems to foreshadow chs. 29-31. But with 27.13 we are in a totally different atmosphere, a violent denunciation of the wicked, and a description of the fate which will befall him in language like this (27.20-23):

Terrors take hold on him as waters,
A tempest stealeth him away in the night.
The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth:
And as a storm hurleth him out of his place.
For God shall cast upon him and not spare:
He would fain flee out of his hand.
Men shall clap their hands at him,
And shall hiss him out of his place.

We should hardly have guessed that this was Job, and there is a widespread impression that a page is missing

between 27.12 and 13, a page containing the end of Job's reply to Bildad and the beginning of a third speech by Zophar. Of all the friends he strikes us as being the least likely to have been silenced by anything Job has said.

These modifications do not affect the general character and plan of the book. It falls into no recognized class of literature. It is a poem, or a series of poems, and it is a dialogue, but we cannot say more. It is too long for a lyric, and though it is full of intense emotion, even of passion, it scarcely comes into that category. It is hardly a drama, for there must surely be some kind of action in dramatic poetry; even a play like the Prometheus of Aeschylus is not without 'something done'. It might be a philosophical dialogue, but there is more feeling in it than reasoned argument, and the greatest philosophical poem we know, the *De Rerum Natura*, is certainly not a dialogue. The book is *sui generis*; all we can say of it is that it is the Book of Job.

The general plan is quite simple, especially if we can eliminate chs. 28 and 32-37. Job speaks first and then the friends in turn; each is answered by Job. There are three rounds to the debate, and Job's last reply is directed not so much to the last of the friends as to God Himself, and is a final demand that He should appear, hear Job's case, and state His own. This occupies chs. 29-31, and is followed in 38 by God's answer. Here we have a snatch from the old story, for the divine speeches are introduced with the words: 'And Yahweh answered Job out of the whirlwind' (38.1, repeated in 40.6). Both the divine name and the whirlwind (which is not mentioned elsewhere) suggest the popular story rather than the poem. Ch. 40.1, which also

introduces a sentence from Yahweh, seems to be from the same source, though the whirlwind does not appear. Job makes a tentative reply to God in 40.3-5, and in 42.1-6 makes that final submission with which the poem ends.

III

THE STORY

THE theme of the book of Job is the problem of suffering. As it stands, there are no less than four solutions, or points of view, offered. We have first the old story, then the position of the friends, followed by Job's own struggle for light, and, finally, the judgement of God Himself. Each deserves special study, for each presents, not merely an individual approach, but that of broad classes of men.

We begin, then, with the old story. Briefly the explanation is that suffering may be a test of genuineness. To make this point clear, the author carries us into the great council of Yahweh. The King of the universe has servants who do His bidding in all places of His dominion; each has his own appointed task and duty. At stated periods a great court is held, at which all present themselves, report on their work, and receive further instructions if any are needed. The scene before us is one of these great occasions.

Among the divine agents one is especially singled out, for his office is among the most important. He is called the *Satan*. The title (it is still a title and not a proper name) simply means 'adversary', and is applied to the enemies of Solomon in I Kings 11.14. In the divine court it indicates an official whose business is to test men; if he finds them wanting, or erring in any way, he must bring a

case against them before Yahweh's court of justice. We have a picture of such a trial, or at least of its conclusion, in Zech. 3.1-7, wherein Satan appears as the accuser or the plaintiff (the two were not clearly distinguished in Israelite law, for the distinction between civil and criminal law had not yet been made), and Joshua the priest as the accused or the defendant. He is wearing the foul garments proper to a man in his position; such a custom prevailed also in the Graeco-Roman world. We are introduced at the moment when sentence is given, and that sentence is acquittal, or judgement in favour of the defendant. The Satan has failed in his case.

There is one among Yahweh's subjects about whom God Himself seems to have no doubts. This is Job, a man against whom no charge can be brought. He has never been convicted of any wrongdoing, and all his actions are dictated by his piety. He is one of those whom men in all ages have tended to regard as supremely happy. He is enormously wealthy, and though in the main the picture is that of a pastoral chieftain, there are signs of agriculture as well; his oxen draw the plough, their natural function in the ancient world. Best of all he has ten children, all now grown up, and they are rightly divided between sons and daughters. Girls are an affliction and a handicap in the east, and though some of them must be born, it is well to have as few of them as possible. So Job has seven sons and three daughters.

With all this prosperity and good fortune, Job has never relaxed his performance of his religious duties. So wealthy is he that each son has an establishment of his own, and they are able to hold a family feast every day. The brothers take it in turn to be host, beginning with the eldest and

ending with the youngest. There is the possibility that in their youth and luxury they might have allowed some impious thought to enter their minds. So, week by week, when the round of feasts is completed, Job offers a burnt-offering for each in turn, thus purifying them and setting them free from the consequences even of the smallest sins.

Can the Satan find any charge to bring against such a man as this? Yahweh believes that he cannot, and with confidence asks the Satan whether there is any fault in Job. The reply is characteristic of that cynical mind which the Satan's duties have forced him to develop. It is easy enough to be good when all goes well. It does not cost much to offer seven cattle a week when you possess a thousand of them, five hundred pairs. It pays Job to keep on good terms with his God, but that does not mean that his goodness comes from the heart. The reality of his virtue can be known only when he is put to the test of calamity. Let Yahweh withdraw His protection, and the chances are that Job will fall. He has always blessed Yahweh for his prosperity, but his gratitude is of the 'lively anticipation of favours to come' sort, and disaster will bring him to the opposite extreme, and he will curse his God instead of blessing Him.

Yahweh accepts the challenge; He still believes in His servant Job, and is confident that he will stand the test. He therefore gives the Satan permission to do his worst on Job, stipulating only that he shall not touch the man's person. He may reduce him to absolute beggary, strip him of all he possesses, children included, but life and health are still to be left to him.

The Satan loses no time. He waits only till the sons of Job have completed their round of feasting, and Job has

offered his sacrifices; and they are 'in a state of grace', and no punishment of any kind is due to them. This little touch must be borne in mind, for it is essential to the Satan's purpose that a calamity befalling the sons shall not be attributable to any sin of theirs. But then the blow falls, and the story is told in breathless, dramatic fashion. A stream of panting messengers come into Job's presence, each reporting a disaster of which he has been an eye-witness, and from which he is the only survivor. First the oxen and the asses are swept off by a sudden raid. Wild tribesmen from the desert have fallen upon them, slaughtered the ploughmen and the guards attending the asses (they are all she-asses, by the way), and carried them off. None has escaped but the messenger himself, and he emphasizes this fact as strongly as words will permit.

This man's story is still unfinished when another bursts in. He has been with the sheep, and a single flash of lightning has fallen and destroyed them all. Again all the herdsmen have perished, with the exception of the single person who has come to bring the terrible news. It is no ordinary thunder-storm which has wrought the damage; otherwise some kind of precautions might have been taken.

Once again the speaker is interrupted before he has finished, and a third messenger begins his tale. Another company of desert raiders (the 'Chaldaeans' can hardly be the racial group which dominated Babylonia from the end of the seventh century onwards) has stampeded the camels. They have formed three companies, and have fallen upon the animals, slaughtering the drivers and attendants. Presumably one company has attacked from the south, one from the west, and one from the north, so forcing the

animals eastwards towards the desert. But in any case they are all gone, and the last of Job's property has disappeared.

But even this is not the full tale of disaster. The most precious of all that Job has still remains; his children are there. But they have been feasting, sons and daughters together, in their eldest brother's house, free from sin, and without a thought of trouble. A hurricane of unprecedented violence has fallen on the house and crushed it, killing all who were in it. One man only has escaped, and he tells his story as the others have done.

In a few minutes Job, the richest man in the east, blessed with an ideal number of sons and daughters, is left a childless beggar. We gather that even the countless slaves he once possessed have been destroyed, all except the four who have brought the shattering news. There is no longer any hope of posterity, and the Satan himself could do no more. But the sufferer's reaction justifies Yahweh's confidence in him. He shows all the signs of mourning, rends his garments, shaves his head, and prostrates himself to the ground. But all he says is:

Naked came I out of my mother's womb.

And naked shall I return thither:

Yahweh gave, and Yahweh hath taken away;

Blessed be the name of Yahweh. (1.21.)

This is the ideal of human conduct, absolute and unquestioning submission to the will of God.

Once more the heavenly cycle of time passes, and once more the great day comes when the servants of Yahweh must report to Him. The Satan is asked about Job, and replies that he is still not satisfied; the test has not been

severe enough. There has been a restriction, and only when that has been removed will it be possible to see what the man's real nature is. Life is the most precious of all things, worth more than even children. The traveller, stopped by the highwayman's cry 'Your money or your life' will give all he has to save his skin, and the final test has not been imposed until Job has been attacked in his own person.

Once again Yahweh accepts the challenge, and gives permission for an assault on Job's body. Again, however, there is a limitation; Job must not be killed. The Satan cannot reasonably object to this; indeed, it is necessary for his own purposes. To put Job to death would have been a confession of failure. It would have admitted that all the tempter's extreme efforts had been unsuccessful, and that he had come to the end of his resources. When society finds a man has committed a crime so terrible that it has no hope of reforming him, remedying the wrong, or securing its own safety, it exacts the death penalty. So, too, the martyr always wins. His opponents have done all they can to bring him into the ways they think right, and they have failed. In their view his persistence means peril to all about him; he must be 'liquidated'. But he has maintained his position, and in his case they have failed. The worst mistake Mary Tudor made in carrying out her religious policy was the execution of Cranmer after his recantation. If she had allowed him to end his days in an obscure prison, she would have struck a heavier blow at the English Reformation than did even the courtiers of Edward VI.

The Satan is not allowed to make this mistake, but does do his worst within the limit imposed on him. He inflicts 'boils' on Job. Now boils are annoying and can be painful,

but they are not among the most terrible of diseases, especially in the east, where they are very common. In the poem, as we have already seen, the boils or sores are a symptom of leprosy, a disease always held to be incurable until the most recent times. It is true that there are rites prescribed in the Law for the restoration of a 'cleansed' leper, but cases coming under this law must have been very few, and were probably due to inaccurate diagnosis of the trouble. But there seems little doubt about Job's case. In 7.5 we read:

My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust;
My skin is broken, and become loathsome (R.V. breaketh
out afresh).

We could hardly have a better description of the leper's sores, over which a crust forms and breaks to let fresh matter flow out. Or again in 7.14f.:

Then thou scarest me with dreams
And terrifiest me through visions:
So that my soul chooseth strangling,
And death rather than my life.

Sores form, not only outside the body, but also in the throat, and have to be constantly cleared. In sleep they produce choking dreams, from which the sufferer awakes with a sense of suffocation. Add to this the utter hopelessness, the impending sense of doom, which runs all through the poem, and we feel that there is only one form of physical suffering which can satisfy the conditions described. It is quite possible that the writer had leprosy in mind, and used the word 'boil' as a euphemism, just as people to-day sometimes speak of 'a growth' when they mean cancer.

The Satan has really done his worst. Job has nothing whatever to hope for. He has lost everything, all the prosperity which, it was assumed, had been the reward of his faultless life. He has not even the means of making a fresh start. Now even such pleasure as can be gained from mere physical life is taken from him. Death and only death is before him, and the end will be preceded by an indeterminate period of suffering. Workers in leper colonies and hospitals have noted that the worst effect of the disease is the utter hopelessness which it produces in the patients. Job has no longer anything to gain from his 'integrity'.

To emphasize the situation Job's wife is introduced. She holds the common view, that it is worth while being good only for what man can get from it. Now that everything is gone, there is no point in maintaining the right attitude to God; better curse Him and so rouse Him into giving the final stroke as quickly as possible. The word in our text literally means 'bless', and the R.V. adopted a theory (for which there is no other evidence than that afforded by this passage) that the word was a farewell utterance; so it could mean 'renounce'. But it is far more probable that originally a curse was actually intended and that scribes, or perhaps the story-teller himself, shrank from repeating so blasphemous a phrase. But every one would know what was meant.

Job, however, does not share his wife's point of view. To him goodness is worth having for its own sake, and is independent of any material advantage that may accrue. It is interesting to note that the thought of suicide never seems to cross his mind. Indeed, in the whole of the Old Testament we have recorded only three cases of self-destruction, those of Saul, Ahitophel, and Zimri; even the first of these is doubtful, for the Amalekite who brings David the news

claims to have struck the fatal blow himself, though at Saul's request. But Job will live; he will not shrink from the worst torture that God can inflict upon him. He has accepted health and prosperity, not for his own sake, but because they are the will of God for him. Equally he must accept suffering, even in its extreme forms, for the same reason. He makes no attempt to question God's motives, or to understand His principles; it is enough for him that God wishes this to happen, and man's part is simply to accept with humility, even with gratitude, all that comes, whether it be 'good' or 'evil'—terms which here have no moral connotation whatever, but merely imply what a man may like or dislike. To him his wife's attitude is 'foolish', but there are degrees of folly, and we get the sense better if we substitute 'impious'. It is this sort of fool who says in his heart 'There is no God' (Pss. 14.1, 53.1).

This, then, is the ideal of religion which the story sets before us. It is characteristic of the east, which always looks for power in the objects of its worship. In face of that power man's only right attitude must be complete submission. We can see the feeling in every aspect of oriental life; in religion its outstanding manifestation is in Islam. That very word implies surrender, and the conception of God is that of good-natured but absolutely irresponsible omnipotence. When a Christian speaks of omnipotence, there is always at the back of his mind the reservation that God has a definite moral character, and cannot do anything which is inconsistent with His own nature. But to the oriental mind it would be the height of arrogance to assume that there is anything which can limit the authority of God, even in Himself. He does exactly as He pleases, and a thing is good simply because He wills it. The destiny of

man, even to its smallest detail in this life or the next, is determined by Him, and that not in accordance with any principle which may be recognized by man, but simply as the fancy takes Him at any moment.

So Job is still submissive, and has clung to his integrity, though he knows, and every one else knows, that it cannot restore his prosperity or his health. The Satan has failed.

That, however, is not the end of the story. Three friends come to offer such consolation as they can give. They are good men, and real friends, for though they may be practically helpless, they will not desert Job in his hour of calamity. At first sight they do not recognize him as he sits on a pile of foul refuse outside the dwellings of men. Presumably, too, the disease has marked his face; if the story intended us to think of him as a leper, we must imagine the disease as eating away the features with gangrene, and reducing it to a form which is positively inhuman. But even this revolting sight will not deter them, and they come to sit with him; at least they can show their sympathy. So they come and for seven days there is no movement and no word is spoken. When the silence is broken, it is broken by the poet; the original dialogue has disappeared.

We know from 42.7ff. that the story originally included such a conversation, and we know from the same source that it cannot have been much like that of the poem. For while Job is commended in the epilogue, and the friends condemned, the former is approved because he had adopted exactly that attitude which Eliphaz and the rest had so strongly recommended. By no stretch of language can the poet's Job be called submissive, or the friends heterodox. We can only guess at what was said, and the probability is that they took much the same line as Job's wife. If that

conjecture be at all near the truth, then their arrival and their consolation are a still further test of Job's integrity. Facts are against him, his wife is against him, and his friends are against him; it seems as if God, woman and man were united in trying to shake his firm grasp of the primary essential of the religious life, complete acceptance of the will of God and whole-hearted submission to whatever that will might impose.

The old story, then, offered a possible solution to the problem of suffering. In some cases it might be a test of man's sincerity, a trial of his motives. It is impossible for the normal human eye to see below the surface, and determine whether a man's conduct is dictated by crafty self-interest or by genuine devotion to a principle. The Satan, whose business has naturally made him cynical, doubts the possibility of absolutely disinterested goodness; perhaps he had never met with a case in his watch over men. We must admit a certain truth in the theory. Most of us have seen different reactions to suffering or bereavement. Some people collapse under the stress; others can take and use it for the strengthening of their moral fibre and the enrichment of their spiritual life. But while it may have this effect it by no means follows that this is its essential purpose; we may have here simply a by-product, and must look further for the true reason. We may get light on the problem from this old tale, but we shall hardly find in it a solution.

If, however, this be the answer intended by the popular story, it is hidden from all the characters. It is the result of something which has taken place in heaven, in the council of Yahweh, to which no mere man is admitted. Job does not know the reason for his sufferings, and neither his wife nor his friends have any inkling of the truth.

There is no mention of it in the epilogue, though Job receives full justification there. The poet, too, completely ignores it though in other ways he takes the narrative of chs. 1 and 2 as a background. The picture is a piece of theological speculation, embodying a truth which had been to some extent verified in men's experience. To the poet clearly the answer to his problem was inadequate and he had to work the whole thing out for himself.

IV

THE FRIENDS

ONE of the principles which were laid down by the prophets and generally accepted in Israel was the law that sin is always followed by suffering. As a general rule, this had long been admitted in Israel, but its application strictly to the individual dates only from the end of the seventh century. It was Jeremiah and Ezekiel who, more than any others, felt that man's dealings with God were essentially those of an individual with his Maker. The younger prophet, in particular, laid it down with some emphasis that the fathers' sins are *not* visited on the children; 'it is the person who sins that shall die' (Ezek. 18.4). To-day we all recognize that this is one side of the truth, though we must not forget the other; a man's sins do affect both those who are round him and those who shall follow him.

At a time when the principles of logic had not been fully developed, it was not unnatural that a false conclusion should be drawn from this premiss. Men tended to infer that all suffering was the result of sin, and that calamity was always a punishment for wrongdoing. It followed that one whose iniquities had hitherto escaped the eye of man might be betrayed by the penalty God had imposed on him. This is not an unnatural belief where a mechanical view of divine justice prevails; it was current in the days of

Jesus, whose disciples could ask, 'Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' (John 9.2.) It is not dead even to-day.

In the age from which the poem of Job comes, this doctrine of exact retribution was the orthodox view. It is represented in the debate by the three friends. They all take up this standpoint, and on its basis give Job excellent advice. Let him confess his sin to God and plead for pardon. God is just, but He is also merciful, and more ready to forgive than men are to seek forgiveness. But while all take the same view, state the same theory, and prescribe the same cure, they are clearly differentiated from one another by the poet. What is more, in spite of their rigidity they do promote the progress of Job's thought. Some of the most important steps he takes spring from remarks made by one or other of the friends.

The first to speak is Eliphaz. He is the oldest of the three; indeed he must be advanced in years, for he uses a phrase which suggests that he is old enough to be Job's father (15.10). He is a really attractive character. He is considerate and has delicate feelings. His approach to Job is almost apologetic, and is very tender. He wants to spare his unhappy friend as much pain as possible and to give him all the comfort he can. There is a mystical strain in his nature, and he has had experiences which, he believes, have brought him into direct contact with God. What he has to offer Job is derived from no human source; he has received it through supernatural revelation.

In the days of his prosperity, Job must have been rather like Eliphaz. He too has been called in to minister to friends in trouble, much as Eliphaz does now. It is, however, surprising to find that what Job has done for others

he cannot do for himself. He could surely have remembered what he had been accustomed to say to his afflicted friends, but it seems that his case is beyond treatment by such methods:

If one try a word with thee, wilt thou be impatient?

Yet who can hold back his speech?

Behold! thou hast admonished many,

Thou wast wont to strengthen drooping hands;

Thy words would keep the stumbling from falling,

And strengthen the feeble knees.

But now it has come to thee thyself, and thou art impatient,

It has touched thee, and thou art dismayed. (4.2-5.)

Yet, says Eliphaz, Job has no need to despair. His life has been substantially good and hitherto he has been faultless. Such a record cannot have deserved violent and prolonged suffering:

Is not thy piety thy confidence?

And the perfection of thy life thy hope?

Remember, who that was innocent ever perished,

Where have the upright ever been destroyed? (4.6, 7.)

Job should have known that this was a well-established doctrine, but Eliphaz is not relying merely on his theology; he has received direct instruction in the mystic's vision:

To me came a word by stealth,

And my ear caught a whisper of it.

Thoughts came from visions by night,

When God-sent sleep falls upon men.

Fear met me, and trembling,
All my bones shook with terror.
A breath passed over my face,
The hair of my head stood on end.
It stood; there was a form I knew not—
That figure before my eyes.
There was silence, and I heard a sound :
Shall mere man be more righteous than God?
Mankind more pure than his Maker? (4.12-17.)

So great are the perfections of God that even the purest and best of His angelic servants is not exempt from His criticism. There is no being in heaven in whom God can find no fault, and the denizens of earth fall far below the celestial company in goodness. Job must have sinned in some way, and Eliphaz gives a solemn warning as to the consequences which may ensue if the sinner does not repent. God is his only refuge, and Eliphaz urges the sufferer to return to Him and seek forgiveness. Job's disasters are to be taken as a kindly warning, part of his spiritual education, and they suggest that there is some small matter in which, perhaps without knowing it, he has offended the Almighty :

For sorrow comes not out from the dust,
Nor does trouble sprout from the soil.
But man is born to trouble,
As sons of the flame soar high.
But I would resort to God,
And lay before God my cause;
His deeds are great and unsearchable,
He works marvels beyond all counting. (5.6-9.)

He saveth the lowly¹ from the sword;
And the poor from the hand of the strong.
So the humble has hope,
And evil shuts her mouth.
How happy is the man whom God reproves!
Do not scorn the chastisement of the Almighty.
He wounds only that he may bind up,
When he crushes, his own hands will cure. (5.15-18.)

Let Job humble himself thus, confess, and seek forgiveness, and all will be well. He will reap benefits greater than those he has received in the past, yet more enormous wealth will be his, and at last he will come to the grave in extreme old age, with memories of long and happy years behind him, leaving numerous children to carry on his name:

Thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace,
Thou shalt visit thy fold and not miss.
Thou shalt know that thy seed is numerous,
And thy issue as the herbage of the earth.
Thou shalt come to the grave in ripe old age,
As a shock of corn comes up in its time.
See! This have we sought out, and it is right;
Hear it, and know it to be true for thee. (5.24-27.)

Satiric rejection of long-established ideas is not uncommon in ancient and modern literature. In their earnestness for truth men see through conventional language and faulty logic, and try to expose the absurdity of certain common beliefs. As a rule they offer us something like a caricature

¹ Possible reading; Heb.: from their mouth.

of what they condemn, enabling us to see it as it were under a microscope, and so learn more of its true character. The speech of Eliphaz is not caricature; it is the real thing. So must innumerable 'comforters' have tried to promise relief and restoration to sufferers. If the prescription has failed, it is because the patient has not carried it out properly or because the disease was too deep-seated for any cure. But seldom, if ever, has the conventional language of consolation been more ruthlessly exposed than it is here. Neither Euripides in ancient Greece nor Shaw in modern Britain ever achieved so utterly crushing a *reductio ad absurdum*. Job's property might, it is true, somehow be recovered or replaced. But his children are *dead*, and seventy sons would not compensate for the seven he has lost. He himself is struck down by a disease which both he and Eliphaz know to be incurable. His case is absolutely hopeless, and though the malady is far advanced, he may yet have to endure years of pain and distress before he sinks into the inevitable grave for which he has prayed. It is with a grim and awful humour that the poet has presented to us the familiar, yet false type of comfort which was (and, possibly, still is) current among devout persons. They mean well, but there is no truth in the position they adopt, or if it is true in certain cases, there are others to which it cannot apply. Eliphaz has tried to heal lightly the shattered limb, and at the outset the poet has told us in no uncertain terms that the traditional view of suffering and its removal is utterly futile.

Job has reached the nadir of experience, and that very fact makes it possible for him to look truth in the face. He knows that he has nothing to gain by meek acceptance of the current dogma, and nothing to lose by rejecting it. He

can afford to put on one side convention, propriety, even traditional piety, and see things as they really are. And they are not what Eliphaz says they are. No matter how he attained his doctrine, even though it may have come in supernatural vision, it is false for Job. And now, with everything of value on earth taken from him, he will not accept a lie even if it would save him.

After Job has made this clear, Bildad speaks (ch. 8). He makes a rather less favourable impression on us than Eliphaz did. There may be good reasons for this. What the older man has said had always sufficed for others and we have already guessed that in days gone by Job himself had used similar language in trying to comfort other sufferers. It is startling, even shocking, to find that he of all men is ready to throw aside theories which have long been held sacred. Bildad's tone is noticeably less tender than that of Eliphaz; he has no thought for the feelings of the victim.

But even allowing for this incipient irritation there is a wide difference between Eliphaz and Bildad. The former is the mystic who has good reason for believing that he is in direct contact with God. There is nothing mystical about Bildad; by contrast he is the scholar. He appeals to the great thinkers of the past, for he has studied them and knows the history of their thought:

Ask a former generation,

Set thee to study the Fathers.

We are but of yesterday, and know nothing;

Our days are a mere shadow on the earth.

It is they who can teach thee and tell thee,

Bring out speech from the store in their heart. (8.8-10.)

Bildad has that curious and quite illogical feeling that men of old were much wiser and better than their modern descendants. It is probably an extension of that respect which all should feel for their elders. They have had more experience of the world than we, and are more likely to see the truth than the younger folk. That, at least, was the view commonly held in the ancient world, and later in the dialogue Eliphaz appeals to Job on that ground. By a curious mental process it came to be thought that these seniors were still far ahead of their successors. There is a certain humility or modesty about this attitude, even when it is (as so often) largely vicarious. In point of fact, however, each generation should be able to stand on the achievements of its predecessors. Their stores of knowledge are at the disposal of those who come after them and it is the privilege and duty of each in the line of succession to add some grain, however small, to the mass already collected.

It would be going too far to suggest that the poet was conscious of the weakness in Bildad's fundamental position; it is at least probable that he, a child of his age, would have agreed up to this point. But he sees clearly what the scholar has to say. Bildad's researches have resulted in a doctrine which is summed up in his opening words:

How long wilt thou speak thus?

And the words of thy mouth be a mighty wind?

Shall God twist justice,

Or the Almighty twist righteousness?

If thy sons sinned against him,

He has delivered them into the power of their sin.

(8.2-4.)

Incidentally we may notice here the genuine Old Testament conception of divine punishment. It is never a mere piece of vindictive rage. Sin and its consequent pain cannot be separated from one another. The evil deed is a sort of living thing sent out into the world by its perpetrator. Sooner or later it must come back to him; it will 'find him out', and work its doom upon him. There may be ways in which the penalty may be modified or largely avoided, but only God knows and can use them. Otherwise the law is as rigid as the Indian doctrine of *karma*. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap' (Gal. 6.7) is a New Testament way of stating the prophetic doctrine, 'They sow the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind' (Hos. 8.7).

This is by the way. Bildad's central thought is expressed in the word *righteous*. Eliphaz had used it, but had not made it pivotal in his attempt to console Job. Justice is Bildad's main theme, the justice which lets loose or withholds the penalty for sin and duly rewards goodness. He does not yet go so far as to charge Job with specific acts of iniquity, but he uses the fate of his children to illustrate the principle. They must have been guilty of some heinous deed to have been so suddenly swept out of life. For the rest, Bildad, like Eliphaz, urges Job to turn to God, drawing the contrasting pictures of the fate in store for the wicked and the blessedness of the righteous. If Job is really what he has always seemed to be, then God will not condemn but will restore :

If thou seek early for God,

If thou plead for the favour of the Almighty,

If thou art pure and upright,

He will surely awake for thee,
And prosper thy righteous dwelling.
And though thy beginning was small,
Thy end shall be very great. (8.5-7.)

Behold! God will not reject the perfect
Nor clasp evil-doers by the hand.
He will fill thy mouth with laughter again,
And thy lips with a cry of triumph.
They that hate thee shall be clothed in shame,
And the tent of the wicked shall be no more. (8.20-22.)

We may pause for a moment to consider the meaning of 'righteousness'. It is one of the key-words in Old Testament theology and becomes in New Testament times one of the dominant conceptions of the Christian thinkers especially of St. Paul. Indeed the first eight chapters of Romans are unintelligible without some appreciation of the Hebrew use of the term.

Originally the word had a forensic sense. Whenever there is a legal dispute, there are in the nature of the case two parties. It does not matter whether the charge is what we should call criminal or whether it is civil. Ancient law did not make the distinction between wrong done to the whole community and wrong done to an individual, and any citizen might appear as the accuser bringing a charge of offence against the state. No lawsuit could be described as '*Rex v. . .*', for the king (or any other supreme authority) is only the judge, not a party to the suit. The principle is not confined to Israel; Socrates was not accused by an Athenian Attorney General or his subordinates, but

by a group of private citizens, among whom Anytus and Meletus were the most prominent. The State was represented not by them but by the 'Dicastery', and merely gave its verdict as to the guilt or innocence of the prisoner.

Every trial, then, ended in the triumph of one party and the defeat of the other. In the one case a man had to suffer any penalty the law might impose, in the other he was free and could take his normal place again among his fellows. To the loser Hebrew applied the term we commonly render 'wicked' and to the winner that which is normally translated 'righteous' in our Bible. Originally, then, the 'righteous' is the person who succeeds in court; and the 'wicked' is the person who fails.

With a growing moral sense in Israel a change came over the use of the terms. It was no longer simply the man who actually won the case, but the man who on ethical principles *ought* to have won it, in other words, the really innocent defendant or accused. Hence the frequent demand that courts of law shall not 'justify' the 'wicked' or condemn the 'righteous'. It is this sense which in the end almost supersedes the other, though the judicial flavour is never entirely lost. So Bildad's last words sound like a hope and, indeed, a promise. But has he really said anything more than Eliphaz did? Job has found that inadequate; is he likely to accept it more readily from the scholar than from the mystic?

Job's reply to Bildad leaves the stage open for Zophar. He is the least attractive of the three. As with Bildad, however, we have to make allowance for him. Job has shown himself no more submissive or amenable to consolation in answering Bildad, and we can well understand

the rising tide of feeling in the minds of the friends. A professional comforter may, as it were, claim the right to cure wounds of the spirit. He has done it repeatedly, and again and again sufferers have accepted the remedies he has proposed. It is most annoying to find that one patient will not respond properly to treatment, and will not even swallow the prescribed medicine, but insists on being miserable in spite of the fact that he has received the best expert attention. This is only human nature, and the friends, whether conscious of it or not, are almost certainly affected by the thought: 'Who is Job that he should not accept our comfort and at least try our method of handling the trouble? It has been good enough for countless others; what right has he to reject it? The insolent fellow must be a far worse sinner than we had at first supposed.' Indeed, in his second speech Eliphaz almost says this:

Among us is one aged and venerable,
Yea, older in years than thy father;
Are not the consolations of God enough for thee?
A word spoken gently unto thee? (15.10f.)

Eliphaz is using the *argumentum ad verecundiam* (appeal to modesty), always more cogent in the east than in the west. He is clearly indignant at the lack of respect shown by the younger man in his refusal to accept the gift which is offered to him. True, he calls that gift the consolations of God, but he is not the only person who has fallen into this confusion of mind. He had, too, more justification than some others, for it will be remembered that he can claim supernatural authority for his position.

If Eliphaz could feel like that there is nothing in Zophar's character, as sketched by the poet, to suggest that he did not feel the slight more keenly. But, even allowing for the growing tension, we find him a man of coarser grain than either of his predecessors. Eliphaz is the mystic and Bildad the scholar, but Zophar is neither. He is the dogmatic theologian, who speaks with 'authority' of his own certain knowledge, and needs neither justification nor support from any other source. He has no need to appeal either to direct experience of God or to the wisdom of the past; he himself is wholly self-sufficient.

It would be a misuse of language to describe Zophar's speech as an argument. It is a categorical and dogmatic statement of the position already adopted by Eliphaz and Bildad. Job has been talking nonsense; if only God would appear and speak, then he would have to face the truth:

Shall there be no answer to the mass of words?

Can a man prove his case by mere talk?

Thy pratings may silence common men;

If thou deride there may be no man to check thee.

Thou sayest, 'My life is pure,

Clean am I in thy sight.'

But would that God might speak!

And open to thee his lips.

And declare to thee the secrets of wisdom,

For sound intelligence is manifold. (11.2-6.)

But God is not there, and Job is not the person to bring Him:

Canst thou by searching find out God?

Canst thou wholly discover the Almighty?

What canst thou do in the heights of heaven?

What knowest thou of that which is deeper than
Sheol?

Of that which is longer than earth,
And broader than the sea? (11.7-9.)

No; God is not there, but fortunately Zophar is present and will prove an adequate substitute. The general human limitation to which Job is subject does not seem to apply to Zophar, for he immediately proceeds to tell Job what God would say if He did appear. This in effect is simply what the others have said :

If thou wilt but order thy heart aright,
And stretch out thy hands in prayer to him,
If there is iniquity in thy hand, put it far from thee,
Let no iniquity dwell in thy tents.
Then mayest thou lift up thy face without blemish,
And be firmly established with nought to fear.
Thou shalt surely forget trouble,
Recall it as waters that have passed. (11.13-16.)

Zophar has drawn the strong contrast between the Omnipotent and Omniscient on the one hand and the weak stupidity of man on the other. It will be enough for Job to confess any sin he may have committed, and to humble himself before God. But the speech ends with a sinister word of warning :

But the eyes of the wicked shall fail for ever,
Their last refuge doth perish,
To breathe out their life is their only hope. (11.20.)

Failure to accept the advice the friends have given will bring hopeless ruin with it. There is still a chance of more or less complete restoration, but if this is rejected there will be no second opportunity.

All three have now spoken. All have said the same thing, though in different language and different temper. The principle is clear; all sin produces suffering, therefore all suffering is due to sin. Job suffers, therefore he is being punished for sin. The only road to recovery is that he should humble himself before God and confess that he is in the wrong; then he will be forgiven and restored. God's moral character is perfect beyond human imagination. His standards are too high even for the spirits that surround His throne, He is infallible in absolute justice, and He is omnipotent. Granted the premisses and the system of logic, the conclusion is inevitable.

There is just one weakness in the position; it is all wrong. The facts do not bear out the conclusion, and either the premisses or the logic is at fault. Job may have sinned without knowing it, but his conscience has nothing with which to reproach him. Certainly he has done nothing to deserve so complete and overwhelming a series of calamities. It is no use trying to bring home his sinfulness to a man who has consistently and unreservedly sought to fulfil the desires of God even in the smallest particular. At the end of the debate Job makes a final statement of the principles which have guided him all through life. In ch. 31 we have the highest ethical standard which the Old Testament contains, and one great commentator has said that it would be well if we could substitute it for the Ten Commandments. Unfortunately it is too long, and would be difficult to memorize, but it should be carefully studied,

for we never reach such a standard again until we come to the teaching of Jesus Himself.

Further, Job is always ready to have shown to him anything which has been wrong in his life. Later on, at the moment when the tension has just reached its height, he admits that the 'root of the matter' is in himself; he is prepared to accept responsibility for what is amiss in him. But first he must be told what is amiss, for he has no idea what it is. He is simply puzzled and bewildered by the events that have taken place. Stunned at first, he has begun to think and ask himself questions, and among them is the problem of his own sin. He cannot believe that all his efforts have been misdirected and vain. But what *is* wrong? What *does* God want that Job has not given or is not prepared to give?

And what is the use of these promises of restoration? We have already noted the kind of effect that the first speech of Eliphaz makes on us, and, presumably, made on Job. He has fallen into a position in which there is and can be no hope whatever, either of complete restoration or of returning health and life. What he needs is something which will help him to face facts as they are, and the conventional piety of the friends has nothing to give him. His case is with God alone, and God is silent.

Yet it is to be noted that up to this point the friends have tried to deal kindly with him, in spite of their growing exasperation. There has been no direct accusation, no formal charge brought against Job. All that even Zophar has done is to suggest that Job is under suspicion. After all, no man is perfect, and Job can hardly claim to be an exception to the general rule. He would do well to remember this, for a terrible fate is in store for the unrepentant

sinner. It is only fair to realize that the friends have treated the sufferer as courteously and as tenderly as their theology and their feelings will permit. A good many of us would have spoken more strongly before the first round of the debate was ended.

Nevertheless, the friends have done no good. But the champions of a conventional and traditional theology are not easily moved by facts. No man who holds firmly to an established hypothesis readily surrenders or even modifies it, especially when it is concerned with a matter of such profound importance as religion. Admittedly, Job's attitude has not been conciliatory, and there has been a noticeable lack of sweet reasonableness in his response to the ministrations of his friends. But the resulting change in them is emotional, not intellectual. They have grown more and more convinced that Job is not what men have always thought him, and by now they have serious doubts as to his real character.

We are thus prepared to find that, when the second round of the debate starts, Eliphaz speaks in a tone which is less sympathetic and more severe than that of his first speech. There is little to suggest the possibility of restoration, even on condition of humble repentance. It is clear at once that he feels Job's position to have been dictated by sheer arrogance :

Of a truth thou makest religion futile,
And doest away with pious meditation.
It is thine iniquity that instructeth thy mouth,
So that thou choosest the tongue of the crafty.
It is thine own mouth that condemns thee, not I;
It is thine own lips that testify against thee.

Wast thou the first man to be born?

Camest thou into the world before the hills?

Didst thou listen in the council of God?

Or dost thou keep all wisdom to thyself? (15.4-8.)

Job's very language is conclusive evidence of a fundamental impiety, and his resistance to the comfort offered to him is a proof of the evil that has hitherto remained unsuspected. We note, too, the hint of annoyance caused by Job's attitude towards the friends themselves, especially towards Eliphaz. He is an old man, and has a right to the respect of his younger acquaintances (15.10). Again we have insistence on the universal imperfection of mankind:

What is mere man, that he should be pure?

And that one born of woman should be righteous?

Behold! He trusts not his holy ones,

Even the heavens are not pure in his sight.

How much less the abominable and the tainted,

The man who drinks evil like water? (15.14-17.)

There is nothing new in this; Eliphaz has said almost exactly the same thing in 4.17ff. The outstanding difference between this speech and the first ascribed to Eliphaz lies in the fact that a very large section of this second utterance is taken up with denunciation of the wicked. It is true that there is no direct application to Job, but there can have been no doubt in the mind of the speaker or of the hearer that Job is the person of whom Eliphaz is thinking when he says:

All his days the wicked writhes in torment,

And few are the years in store for the ruthless.

Terror rings in his ears,
Even in prosperity the destroyer comes upon him.
He cannot trust that he will return from the darkness,
He is reserved for the sword.
He is given as food to the vulture,
He knows that he is appointed for doom,
The day of darkness overwhelms him.¹
Distress and anguish overpower him,
As a king prepared for battle.
Because he has stretched out his hand against God,
And played the warrior against the Almighty.
(15.20-25.)

The speech ends with language which is a threat rather than a warning:

Let him not be deceived and trust in falsehood,
For falsehood shall be his recompense.
He shall be cut down² before his time,
And his branch shall never be green.
He shall shed his unripe grape like a vine,
And cast away his blossom like an olive.
For the company of the impious is barren,
And fire devours the tents of bribery.
Conceiving ill-doing and bearing wrong,
Their belly prepares deceit. (15.31-35.)

We notice here especially the entire absence of the hope which Eliphaz once held out. His first exhortation dwelt largely on the possibility of restoration. If Job will but do

¹ Following the text current among Egyptian Jews, which yields here a better sense than that normally used in Palestine.

² Again following the Egyptian tradition.

the little thing that is asked of him, humble himself, make confession and plead for pardon, then all will be well, and Job's latter days will be even happier than his early life. But Eliphaz has no more to say in this vein. Job has arrogantly rejected the offer of forgiveness, and has insisted on his own integrity. That at least is the impression made on Eliphaz, and we can see how and why it came to dominate his mind. Whatever Job's sins may have been, the attitude which he has displayed in the presence of God, taken with his refusal to accept what the friends regard as the 'consolations of God' (15.11), suggests a far more terrible state of sinfulness than they had suspected. Job's real nature is coming to light under the glare of suffering, and unless some radical change takes place in him, there is no hope for him. It is difficult to imagine conditions more horrible than those in which Job finds himself, but even that is not impossible, and the man must be warned as to the inevitable results of his contumacy.

Bildad speaks again in ch. 18. As we might expect, he simply follows the line already taken by Eliphaz, and follows it in his own way. He is even more bitter than his predecessor, and there is little trace even of the comparative sympathy which he had shown in his first speech. As usual, he begins with a personal denunciation of Job, who has failed to give due honour and respect to the good and great men who have come to do their best for their afflicted friend, and have found him to be really unworthy of their consideration and kindness. After all, Job is doing more harm to himself than to anyone else. A wild beast, a bear, leopard or lion, rends and tears his prey, but Job is doing just that to himself (18.4). There can be only one result of such conduct:

For the light of the wicked is quenched,
No spark shines from his fire.
Light in his tent grows dark,
And his lamp is quenched beside him.
His wicked steps are cramped,
His own plan casts him down.
His feet bear him into a net,
And upon its meshes he walks.
A snare holds him by the heel,
A trap grips him fast. (18.5-9.)

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The first-born of death devours his limbs.
That which he trusted shall be rooted out from his tent,
He shall be led to the king of terrors. (18.13b-14.)

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Sulphur shall be sprinkled over his dwelling.
Below, his root shall wither;
Above, his branch shall be cut off.
His memory perish from the earth,
He has no name on the face of the land.
He is driven from light into darkness,
He is chased out of the world.
He has no scion or descendant among his people,
None shall survive where he lodged.
The west shall be appalled at his fate,
And the east seized with horror
These are the dwelling of the wicked,
This is the place of one who knows not God.
(18.15b-21.)

Here we notice at once a fresh advance in the attack on

Job. Eliphaz has described in general terms the fate of the wicked, but Bildad has added details which point to a particular individual. We had reason to suspect that the older man was thinking of Job, but the younger has left the matter in no doubt. What can 'the first-born of death' mean but some horrible and deadly form of sickness? Leprosy comes at once to mind, and even if our diagnosis of Job's malady is inaccurate, we know enough of it to be sure that Bildad is expressly pointing to him. Further, the childlessness of the wicked can hardly be interpreted except as a direct reference to the fate of Job's sons. Clearly the bitterness against him is gradually heightening, and one of the outstanding features of the poet's skill is to be seen in the way in which he presents and interprets the reaction of orthodox theology to the independent thinker. We can trace the movement from sympathy to suspicion, from suspicion to condemnation, and from condemnation to an attitude which is very much like hatred.

The temperament of the three friends is skilfully used to bring out the emotional movement. We should expect Bildad to begin where Eliphaz had left off, and Zophar to advance further on the road than Bildad. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that while Zophar's second speech has nothing to add to what Bildad has given us, there is a directness that has hitherto been lacking. Even specific sins are mentioned; up to this point the charges against the wicked have been general and rather vague. We feel, too, that while Bildad has at least preserved the forms of a semi-judicial pronouncement, Zophar has thrown off all concealment and is giving vent to sheer hostility.

Almost at once Zophar breaks into a description of the speedy destruction of the wicked:

He shall fly as a dream and none shall find him,
He shall be driven off as a vision of the night.
The eye which beheld him shall see him no more,
Nor look again on the place where he was.
The poor shall crush his children,
His own hands shall give back his wealth.
His bones are still full of youthful vigour,
But they shall lie down with him upon the dust.
Evil may be sweet in his mouth,
He may hide it under his tongue,
He may spare it and let it not go,
He may keep it close within his mouth,
Yet his food is changed in his bowels,
In his belly is the poison of vipers. (20.8-14.)

Zophar seems to be especially interested in snakes. Because the wicked man secretes their poison, he shall, appropriately, perish of snake-bite:

He shall suck the poison of vipers,
The adder's tongue shall slay him. (20.16.)

Zophar was not the last to suppose that it is the snake's tongue which is its deadly weapon.

Soon he goes further, and speaks of actual sins which the wicked man has committed:

For he has crushed and forsaken the poor,
Reft his house from him, and not built it. (20.19.)

Finally, Zophar goes on to picture the last calamities of the wicked man:

The heavens reveal his iniquity,
And earth rises against him.
The produce of his house is rolled up as by a wave,
Washed away in the day of his anger.
This does God assign to the wicked,
This is the heritage God appoints for him. (20.27-29.)

So ends the second round of the debate. The friends have stated their case, and stated it over and over again. But, once more, it is not their actual position which is important; that is familiar to the poet and to his audience, and needs no explanation. They have used no real arguments, but made their assertions with a dogmatism which is still dogmatism, though two of them have been able to appeal to some authority outside themselves. They have, however, shown to what lengths theological dogmatism can carry its adherents. Job has suffered, therefore he has sinned. He has denied having committed any sin which is in the least commensurate with what he has endured. This only enhances his iniquity, and adds arrogance to his other faults. Even though there is no evidence whatever for evil deeds committed by him, the friends are compelled by their views to ascribe sin to him, and must go on to make definite charges and condemn the unfortunate man without a hope of appeal or reprieve.

So we come to the third round of speeches, and once more Eliphaz sets the tone. There is reason to believe, as we have already seen, that his is the only speech of the three which has come down to us intact. This matters the less, since the others take their cue from him and always say the same thing in different words. This time

he descends into direct accusation and condemnation, almost into sheer abuse, and enumerates the hypothetical sins of which Job is guilty. It is to be noted that these are the offences commonly ascribed to the rich tyrant:

Is it a pleasure to the Almighty that thou shouldst be just?

Or gain that thou shouldst live a perfect life?

Is it for fear of thee that he seeks to put thee right?

Or comes into court with thee?

Is not thy wickedness great?

There is no limit to thy iniquities.

For thou takest pledges from thy brothers for nothing;

Thou dost strip off men's garments and leave them naked.

Thou dost allow the weary nought to drink,

And keepest back bread from the starving.

It is the man of strong arm who owns the earth,

And the man of high standing dwells in it.

Thou dost expel the widow and leave her with nought,

And the arms of the orphan thou¹ dost crush. (22.3-9.)

We might be listening to Amos or Micah, denouncing the heartless and selfish plutocrat of the eight century B.C. The whole story, both as given in the popular tale, and as assumed by the poet, makes it impossible that Job should have been really addicted to this type of sin, and when he closes the debate in ch. 31 he expressly denies some of the charges as he calls on God to admit him to the divine presence. But what other explanation can the friends offer or accept? Their theological position inevitably leads to

¹ Following the Egyptian tradition; the Palestinian has 'he'.

the conclusion that Job is guilty of ruthless oppression. He has been a very rich man and a great sinner; these are the sins of the rich man, therefore these are the sins that Job has committed.

But even so, Eliphaz refuses to believe that forgiveness is impossible, it is important to notice that when the attack on Job is most violent this old friend can still urge him to a course which will bring him safely out of all his troubles :

If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up,
If thou put iniquity far from thy tent,
Put gain upon the dust,
And Ophir among the rocks of the ravine-torrents,
Then the Almighty shall be thy gain,
And precious silver to thee.
For then shalt thou delight in the Almighty,
And lift up thy face unto God.
Thou shalt make thy prayer to him, and he shall hear thee;
And thou shalt perform thy vows.
Thou shalt utter a decree, and it shall stand for thee;
And light shall shine on thy ways.
When they bring thee low thou shalt say, 'up'!
And he will save him whose eyes are cast down.
He will deliver the innocent¹ man,
He shall be saved for the purity of his hands.
(22.23-30.)

Thus we take leave of Eliphaz; in spite of his strong convictions and his stern denunciations of what he believes to be wrong, he is still a man whose heart goes out to his

¹ Probable reading.

suffering friend, and he would do his best for him. Devotion to dogma has not killed charity in him.

We may assume that Bildad's third speech includes ch. 26. He begins in ch. 25 by calling attention to the greatness of God, and to that divine standard of judgement which allows no created being to escape wholly a charge of wrongdoing. He repeats what is now a well-worn theme:

How can mere man be righteous with God?

How can he that is born of woman be pure?

Behold! even the moon loses its brightness,

And the stars are not pure in his eyes.

How much less that grub, mere man!

That worm, the child of mankind!

What help hast thou given to the strengthless?

Hast thou saved him whose arm is powerless?

What counsel hast thou given to the witless?

Hast thou taught sound sense in plenty?

To whom hast thou spoken?

Whose breath has gone forth from thee?

(25.4-6, 26.2-4.)

This is in direct contradiction to what Eliphaz said at the beginning of the debate. There Job is represented as one who has often helped the sufferer with his advice and comfort; this, says Bildad now, Job has never done. Even merit which he has acquired in time past has been totally forgotten. In support of the view that this is Bildad and not Job, we note the fact that the verbs are in the singular; Job has never addressed any of the friends as 'thou', always grouping them together and assuming, quite justifiably, that all are agreed in what any one of them actually says.

From this point on Bildad confines himself to giving a picture of the majesty of God, whose power is felt below the earth, on its surface, and in the sky above:

The very shades writhe,
And they that dwell with them below the waters,
Sheol is laid bare before him,
Abaddon has nought to cover it.
He stretches out the north over chaos,
Suspends the earth over nothingness.
Binds up waters in the misty air,
So that the cloud is not rent with their weight.
(26.5-8.)

By his strength he roused the Sea,
By his intelligence he crushed the Dragon.
By his breath the heavens are clear,
His hand pierced the fleeing serpent. (26.12-13.)

These last two verses are especially interesting, since they seem to hint at a creation-myth not unlike that which had been current in Mesopotamia from very early times. Various forms of the story were known in different periods and in different peoples. The best-known comes from Babylonia, and tells of a great revolt against the gods led by a female monster named Tiamat, and a male associate, Kingu. The young hero-god, Marduk, went out to war against the confederates, taking the wind as one of his weapons. With its aid he slew Tiamat and her accomplice, and from the body of the monster constructed the earth as we know it. Marduk is the special god of Babylon, and other great centres told the story with their chief deity in the role of divine conqueror and creator. Some forms of

the myth appear to have asserted that the monster was not killed but imprisoned in the sea; indeed there are times when we suspect that the enemy is identified with the sea, kept shut up by the barrier of the land.

Whether such a story was current in ancient Israel is not certain, but it is possible and even probable. In Mesopotamia it formed an essential part of the ritual observed in the New Year festival, when the people celebrated the repetition of the act of creation as seen in the return of young life to the dry earth. If such a ritual was actually practised in pre-exilic Israel it has been rigorously expunged from our records, as was to be expected. It may, however, have remained as a popular tale and the references to it in the later literature no more imply a belief in its literal truth than do Milton's references to the Greek and Roman Pantheon.¹

Zophar's last speech, if it has really survived in part, is to be found in the latter verses of ch. 27. As we have seen, vv. 7ff. are much more natural in the mouth of the friends than in that of Job himself. To judge from what is left, Zophar followed the line drawn by Eliphaz, and gave rather more than a hint of the actual sins with which he is prepared to charge Job. His reference to 'oppressors' in v. 13 is the nearest we have to actual accusation in the verses which have survived. In the next verse the sons of the wicked man are mentioned, though the language does not quite fit the old story, for the children are either killed by the sword or else starve. But it is clear that Zophar's interest lies in the punishment of evil-doers, among whom, we gather, Job is the chief.

¹ For further study of the myth, reference may be made to *Myth and Ritual*, ed. S. H. Hooke.

So ends the debate, for when Job next speaks it is to prepare the way for the concluding theophany. No more is heard of the friends, at least from the poet. They have said their say, and the issue now lies directly between Job and God Himself. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have no share in the final scene and are completely ignored when God appears to answer Job. Yet they have played their part. They have stated, in terms as clear and emphatic as any that can be used, a theory of suffering which has been widely spread through the history of human thought. We have seen how it arose from the ethical elements in Israelite theology, but it outlived the Old Testament age, and was one of the errors which Jesus Himself had to correct. It exists among us to this day, and the conception of a mechanical law of exact retribution is to be found wherever there is any idea of a righteous and divine ruler.

The refutation of this view has not been undertaken in formal terms. What has destroyed it, and destroyed it far more effectively than mere logic could have done, is the way in which it has been presented by its champions. In face of the actual facts they have been led into an impossible position. They have been compelled to assume events for which there is no evidence, events which they themselves would not have thought possible before Job's calamities fell upon him. They have made unsubstantiated charges which are energetically repudiated by the accused, the only available witness in the case. Moreover the past history which lies behind the case tends fatally against the accusers. The whole forms a brilliant piece of *reductio ad absurdum*.

The poet is a keen observer of human nature, and has a gift for the portrayal of character. It is easy to condemn the friends, but we understand them; and again and again

we are compelled to admit that, in their place, we might well have felt, thought and spoken as they did. We can see the effects of a rigid theology, and the natural reaction of orthodoxy to outspoken heresy. We note how people, naturally kind and sympathetic, can be stirred emotionally into opposition and almost into hatred by a shock to their feelings and a denial of their creed. These three men may have made no positive contribution to the solution demanded by the great problem, but they serve as a foil to Job himself, and they have a significant place in the artistic structure of the poem. It might have been a comparatively dull exposition of the general problem if the genius of the poet had not introduced them and treated them as he has done.

V

JOB

WE have looked at two attempted solutions of the problem of suffering presented in the Book of Job. That of the old story is interesting, but it is pure speculation. There is, in the nature of the case, no evidence, since the basic transactions take place in a sphere which is beyond the range of human knowledge or approach. It is significant that, though the poet was clearly well aware of the story and uses it as a background for his discussion, there is not the slightest suggestion that this may be the right solution of the problem. There is no hint of it whatever in any remark made either by the friends or by Job, no reference to the Satan, no suspicion that the answer to the great question should be sought in the inner Council of God. Even in so much of the epilogue to the popular tale as is still preserved the opening chapters are ignored and the only references are in vague terms, though the number of Job's second family and the doubling of his property imply knowledge of certain details in the prologue. Clearly the poet was not prepared to accept the solution offered in the story as being at all satisfactory.

Equally worthless from his point of view is the position taken by the friends. That has become obvious from the way in which the poet has handled them. Speaking of his own experience through the mouth of Job, he can state with

absolute certainty that though he cannot claim perfection he has never been guilty of the crimes ascribed to him by the friends, or of any others which would justify a punishment so terrible as the disasters which have fallen upon him. So we inevitably ask what he himself has to say, how he reacts to the situation and what solution, if any, he can honestly find for the problem.

At the outset there is, strictly speaking, no true problem. When, after the long silence, Job at length speaks, he breaks out :

Perish the day I was born !
The night when one said, Behold, a man-child !
Let that day be gloom,
May God not seek it from on high,
May no ray of light gleam upon it. (3.3-4.)

So begins a great curse on the day of his birth, which is to be blotted out from the calendar :

May they that curse days mark it,
That stand ready to rouse Leviathan.
May its dawn-stars be darkened,
May it look for light and find none,
May it see not with the shimmering eyelids of
breaking day.
Because it shut not my womb-doors,
Hid not trouble from my eyes. (3.8-10.)

Here again is a mythical reference. Beneath the sea is a great monster, mentioned also in Amos (9.3), who is employed by God as a kind of executioner, to carry out his

sentence on those who have incurred His wrath. In v. 9 we have the picture of a dawn which never comes. The night has been bright with stars and, as always, one of the signs of the coming day is that their light fails. Hopes of day-break are raised by the disappearance of the stars but no sign of the rising sun follows; the day has been wiped out from the calendar.

All this is the fervid expression of a lament that Job ever was born at all. But if he had to enter the world, would that he had died at birth:

Why did the lap receive me?

Why the breasts, that I should suck them?

For now I might have lain at peace,

Slumber and rest had been mine,

With kings and counsellors of earth,

Who builded pyramids for themselves,

Or with princes, rich in gold,

Who filled their houses with silver.

I had been like a hidden abortion,

As babes who have never seen the light.

There the wicked cause no more suffering,

There the weary are at rest.

Prisoners take their ease together,

They hear not the voice of the taskmaster;

Small and great are there,

And the slave is free from his master. (3.12-19.)

We have no better or fuller picture of the idea called up in the Hebrew mind by the term Sheol except, perhaps in the great taunt-song over the death of a tyrant in Isa. 14.4ff., though that passage suggests a particular occasion and

not a general description. But Job has been denied the privilege of an early death; can he not die now?

Why does he give light to the sufferer?
And life to the weary in soul?
To them that long for death and find it not,
That search for it more than for hidden treasure,
That would gladly come to a tomb,
And would rejoice to find their grave? (3.20-22.)

This is intelligible; life now contains nothing and promises nothing which would be of the least value to Job.

But at the same time there is, strictly speaking, no problem here. The 'Why?' is simply a rhetorical question; Job is not really asking for God's reasons. The whole is no more than a cry of anguish, torn from his soul by the manifold calamities which have fallen upon him. He is still in a measure stunned; he has not begun to think, but can only feel.

It is the first speech of Eliphaz which raises the problem. In his well-meant efforts to console his friend and give him hope, he has maintained that Job's sufferings must be a punishment from God for some slight wrong that he has done, perhaps unconsciously. Let him humble himself before the Almighty, confess his sin if he is aware of it, in any case beg for mercy and pardon, and all will be well. The futility of what Eliphaz says is obvious and has already been noted. So far from giving relief it brings into Job's mind a new and terrible thought. It is God who is treating him thus.

A simple philosophical enquiry into the problem of suffering might be undertaken by one who looked on the question

from the outside, and merely sought a theodicy—'to justify the ways of God to men'. But to one who suffers as Job has done, there is a prior question. Religion is a matter of personal relationships between God and Job, and the general question cannot be attempted till the sufferer has faced and solved the doubt that arises in his mind on this score. Quite simply Job has to ask himself, 'Is God my friend or my enemy?' To judge from all appearances, He is the latter. No friend could possibly bring such appalling suffering on one he loved, and that without reason or explanation. Eliphaz seems to make little of what Job has endured and still endures. He has tried to heal lightly the shattered soul, with his 'kiss the place and make it well' attitude, and all he has done is to intensify the suffering by transferring it to the deepest level of the spirit. So Job begins:

Oh that my anguish could be weighed,
My calamity laid in a balance!
It would be heavier than the sand of the sea,
Therefore my talk is wild.
For the arrows of the Almighty are with me,
Their poison drinks my soul;
The terrors of God are arrayed against me.
Does the wild ass bray over verdant pasture?
Or the ox bellow over his fodder? (6.2-5.)

He really is hurt, and hurt beyond all experience. What Eliphaz has said is worse than useless:

My brothers are as treacherous as a *wadi*,
As passing *wadi* streams.

Black are they with ice,
On them the snow vanishes.
In the season they are scorched and vanish,
In the heat they disappear from their place. (6.15-17.)

There follows a picture of the caravan which knows that there has been water in the mountain torrent and, desperate with thirst, turns aside from its course only to perish in the chaotic waste of sand.

Then he turns to his physical sufferings and recalls the restless nights and the days of pain, the loathsome sores and the certainty of death:

My days are swifter than a shuttle;
They are ended without hope.
Remember that my life is but a breath,
My eye shall never again look on prosperity.
The eye of him that saw me shall behold me no more,
Even while thou watchest me I shall cease to be.
Clouds vanish and are gone;
So none that goes down to Sheol shall come up again.
He shall never return to his house,
And his place shall know him no more. (7.6-10.)

This very hopelessness makes it possible for Job to speak freely for he has passed beyond hope and fear. God is treating him as the old myth made the gods treat Tiamat:

Am I the sea, or the dragon,
That thou shouldest set a guard over me? (7.12.)

God's realm has never been in any danger from Job, even

if he had risen in revolt. He is far too weak and insignificant; surely God can leave him alone for a moment and let him have some brief respite? Saints of old have felt how little they were, and have marvelled that God can care for them. Job is just as small as they, but his surprise is that God thinks it worth while to torture him :

Do I spurn thee? I shall not live for ever.

Let me alone, for my life is but a gasp.

What is mere man, that thou shouldest make him great,

And that thou shouldest set thy heart upon him,

Visit him every morning,

Test him every moment?

Why canst thou not look away from me,

Loose hold of me, while I swallow my spittle?

Do I sin against thee? What harm can I do thee,

O thou watcher of men?

Why hast thou made me thy target,

So that I have become a burden to myself?

Why dost thou not take away my transgression,

And pardon my iniquity?

For now I shall lie in the dust,

Thou shalt seek me diligently, but I shall not be there.

(7.16-21.)

The grim parody on Ps. 8.4 has attracted the notice of all students of the book. More important, however, is the dim feeling expressed in the last line. Job cannot really believe with all his heart that God is as bad as the friends' theology would seem to imply. For the time being something has gone wrong, but it cannot be permanent. Sooner or later even God will want Job, will see all that his devotion means,

and so will wish to resume the old relations between them. But then it will be too late; Job stands already on the threshold of death, and when God turns back to him he will have passed through those doors which open to admit all men but are eternally closed to such as would come out.

It is at this point that Bildad intervenes with his doctrine of divine righteousness. He may quite well have meant the term purely in its derived, ethical sense. But this does not occur to Job in his present state of mind. God has, as it were, declared war on him, or at least has brought charges against him. And now Bildad reminds him that God is certain to win. Job's case is hopeless, settled before it opens. At the same time he cannot but toy with the thought of meeting God face to face, and presenting his case even though it is foredoomed to failure. Indeed, this conception of a great trial scene dominates his thought from this point onwards, and unless we realize this we shall miss the import of a great deal that Job says, and, indeed, the whole form which the discussion takes in Job's mind.

The first effect on Job, however, is to make him accept the situation with a sense of complete hopelessness:

Truly, I know that it is so;

How can man prevail against God?

Were he willing to plead against him

He could not answer one question in a thousand.

Be man never so wise or strong,

Who has stood against God and prospered?

He removes mountains and they know it not;

He overturns them in his anger.

He shakes the earth from its place,

Its pillars shudder. (9.2-6.)

And then he continues with further illustrations of the grandeur of God and of His power. So he realizes his own helplessness in the presence of such an adversary :

God turns not back his anger,
Even the helpers of Rahab bowed under him.
How much less can I answer him,
Or choose my words with him?
Though I were in the right, I could not answer him;
I could but plead for mercy with my adversary.
Though he answered when I called him,
I would not believe that he would listen to me.

(9.13-16.)

I may be in the right, but my own mouth would condemn me;
Though I were faultless, he would prove me a rogue.
Though I were perfect I would not know myself,
I would spurn my very life. (9.20, 21.)

No matter how strong his case would be, it would be impossible for him to present it, for God would transform his very defence into an accusation. His own tongue would turn traitor and give evidence against himself. In face of this overwhelming power he is helpless; there is no room even for an arbitrator. He cannot begin to state his case until God lifts the terror from his heart :

Were he a man like me, I would answer him;
We could come together into court.
If there were an arbitrator between us,
He might lay his hand on us both.

If he would turn his terrible rod from me,
And let not fear of him dismay me,
I would speak and not fear,
But I am not thus in myself. (9.32-35.)

But Job cannot get rid of the thought that he might meet God and state his case. He would ask why it was that he had been treated thus, and the English reader is irresistibly reminded of lines such as those into which Fitzgerald rendered the Persian poet :

. . . Why, ne'er a peevish boy
Would break the bowl from which he drank in joy;
Shall he that made the vessel in pure love
And fancy, in an after rage destroy?

None answered this, but after silence spake
A vessel of a more ungainly make :
' They sneer at me for leaning all awry;
What! did the hand, then, of the Potter shake? '

Job put it in language something like this :

Is it any profit to thee that thou shouldest oppress me?
That thou shouldest spurn that on which thy hands
have laboured. . . ?
Hast thou eyes of flesh?
Or seest thou only as mere man sees?
Are thy days short as mere man's?
Or thy years as those of mankind?
That thou seekest for iniquity in me,
And searchest out my sin?

Though I know that I do no wrong,
There is none to deliver me from thy power.
Remember how thou madest me as clay,
Wilt thou turn me to dust again? (10.3-7, 9.)

There seems to be no *sense* in the treatment God metes out to Job. Mere man (Hebrew has a rather contemptuous word for humanity, which Job often uses, as here) might possibly do something so stupid as to destroy a thing on which he had lavished care and toil. But even he would be unlikely to do it, and why should God? Men are short-lived, and cannot wait to see the full results of their actions, but God has for ever. And what can God possibly gain by the torture of His own creature? Let Him at least give Job a moment's respite before he passes into that darkness which is outside God's realm, and from which there is no return.

Zophar, as we have seen, makes but slight contribution to the debate, except in one phrase which has little effect immediately, but will in future rise again in Job's thought:

Canst thou by searching find out God?
Or wilt thou win full knowledge of the Almighty?
(11.7.)

His point is, of course, that the infinitesimal cannot hope to appreciate the infinite as He really is. No mere human intelligence can possibly grasp or explain God; all that can be known of Him is such dogma as men like Zophar have to offer. This Job has refused, and persists in continuing the quest with such equipment as he has

of his own. Apparently Zophar does not mean that God is unknowable, because he seems to claim that he at least knows exactly what God's reaction to Job will be. But, it is to be assumed, He is to be known only by special revelation or to special people, of whom Zophar is one.

Job's immediate response is to admit the greatness of God. No less than Zophar, he is fully aware:

Who does not know all this?

That the hand of Yahweh has wrought this?

In his hand is the life of all that lives,

And the spirit of all human flesh.

Does not the ear test words

As the palate tastes food? (12.9-11.)

He continues with a picture, not less impressive than that of Zophar, of the greatness of God, especially in His dealings with man:

Behold! he overthows and none may rebuild,

He closes the door on man, and none may open it.

He holds back the waters and they dry up,

He sends them forth and they overturn the earth.

He has strength and intelligence,

To him belong the man who errs and the man who leads astray.

He makes counsellors go barefoot,

And turns judges into fools. (12.14-17.)

But Job is dealing with God, not with the friends, and soon turns back to his own line of thought. The hope of a

fair trial is growing stronger, and he even imagines the conditions under which it may take place :

If I could but lay my cause before him,
I know that I should be proved in the right.
Who is he that shall plead against me?
Should I now be silent, I would pass away.
Only two things do not to me,
Then I would not hide from thy presence.
Take thy oppressive hand far from me,
And terrify me not with fear of thee.
Then call, and let me answer,
Or let me speak and do thou respond. (13.18-22.)

But at once the thought comes back : all this is hopeless;
God is torturing him, and cannot be expected to change.
Man is worse off even than a tree :

For there is hope for a tree,
When it is cut down it may sprout again,
Its shoot will never cease.
Though its root grow old in the earth,
And its stock die in the dust,
Yet at the scent of water it may bud,
And form branches like a young plant.
But when man dies, he is prostrate;
Mankind pass away, and where are they? (14.7-10.)

Then comes a faint hope, only to vanish almost at once :

Oh that thou wouldest hide me in Sheol!
Conceal me, till thy wrath be turned,
Set me a limit and remember me!

If a man die, shall he live again?

All the days of my service would I wait,
Until the change came to me.

Thou wouldest call, and I would answer thee,

Thou wouldest long for the work of thy hands.

But now thou dost count my steps,

Thou dost not overlook¹ my sin. (14.13-16.)

Again we notice something, a feeling rather than a thought, which we have observed before. God is not, cannot be, as cruel as the friends make Him out to be. All his life Job has relied on the divine friendship and he knows that he himself has consciously done nothing which could interfere with the perfect relationship between the two. At the end of his first answer to Eliphaz Job has dimly sensed God's need of him; God will want him when it is too late. Now that feeling is a little stronger; Job uses a more vigorous word to express God's longing for him. Further, there is the faint adumbration of a doubt as to whether even Sheol can keep man and God permanently apart. Long ago Amos had insisted that the wicked could not escape divine vengeance by taking refuge in Sheol (Amos 9.2), and if there is any truth in that view, then it would seem to follow that God takes thence His friends as well as His enemies. But the dim feeling has not yet grown into formal thought, and even the former of these two feelings has to wait for complete expression till Eliphaz has spoken once more.

As we saw in looking at the friends, Eliphaz speaks the second time solely of the vengeance God wreaks on the

¹ So the tradition among Egyptian Jews; in Palestine 'Watch over' was the accepted reading.

wicked, with little or none of the hope he had held out at first. Once again, all he does is to increase the spiritual agony of the sufferer. The tension is becoming unbearable, and the stress approaches the point of strain :

God gives me over to the evil,
And hurls me into the hands of the wicked.
I was at peace but he has shattered me,
He has seized my neck and broken me asunder.
He has set me up as his target,
His archers are all around me.
He cleaves my reins, unpitying.
He pours my gall upon the earth. (16.11-13.)

But the very intensity of that passion which makes him put sackcloth on his body and reddens his eyes with tears, drives him in desperation to make a great leap out of his agony to a place where he may find a sure foothold. The friends are against him; God is against him. To whom then can he appeal? There must be, there is, One who will see justice done to him :

O earth! cover not my blood,
Let there be no place for my cry.
For now my witness is in the heavens,
And he that shall testify for me is in the height.
My friends scorn me,
But unto God does my eye drip tears.
That he may plead for a man with God,
As a man does with his neighbour. (16.18-21.)

So the seed which Eliphaz unwittingly sowed has sprung

up and born fruit. Job is sure that somewhere there must be a real God, and to that real God he appeals against the God of popular theology. It is difficult for us to imagine the audacity and the splendour of this utterance. Faith is always a victory, not simply a weapon which wins victory. But it is seldom that a man has to overcome such obstacles in reaching his faith. All his life Job has held to a certain opinion. He has never heard it challenged, still less contradicted. It is held with intense strength by those who love him best, and by those who would most gladly see him restored to his former happiness and believe it possible that he should be restored if he will take one simple step and confess his sin. For the God of the theologians is both just and merciful; he may be angry with a sinner and punish the sin, but he can and will pardon if there be any sign of penitence. This is not an ignoble caricature of God as Job even now knows Him to be. But the picture has one fatal error; it is inadequate. It assumes that suffering has only a single cause, and that cause is the sin of the sufferer. Now Job *knows* that he has not deserved all the disasters which have befallen him; here the picture is untrue. There must be some other reason, inscrutable perhaps, but yet real, which would explain the facts as they have happened. God *is* just, God *is* loving, and therefore Job can appeal to Him in the last extremity of his spiritual battle, and win the victory of a personal faith.

So Job has at last reached firm ground, and is beginning to raise himself from the morass of doubt into which he has been hurled. At least he knows that God is his friend, and the dim feeling has grown into a definite conviction. But at once another barrier is raised before him, a barrier whose

foundations have been laid by Zophar. How can he reach God, and reach Him in time? For only a brief space of life is before him, and even God cannot give him what he needs in the few years that yet remain to him :

For but a few years come,
And I tread the path on which I shall not return.
(16.22.)

In one sense he has found a solid faith, but (as so often happens) the solution of one problem has but opened up another, which may prove even more serious. And for the moment Job seems to fall into a deeper emotional chasm than that in which he had already found himself :

If I wait for Sheol as my home,
I spread my couch in the darkness.
I call destruction my father,
The worm my mother and sister.
And where, now, is my hope?
And who shall behold my expectation?
They descend to the bars of Sheol,
Together we go down to the dust. (17.13-16.)

It needs but the violence of Bildad to bring Job's despair to an extreme point. When he speaks again he is almost incapable of coherent thought. It seems as if all the forms of his trouble had risen again and were attacking him together with all their force. None of the earlier outbursts stirs us so much as this in ch. 19. First it is the friends who

have tried to shame him. But they are insignificant compared with God:

If indeed you magnify yourselves against me,
And condemn me to my shame,
Know that it is God who has robbed me of justice,
And cast his net around me. (19.5-6.)

And what has God not done to him? We have the old sense of hostility reappearing, and this time there are fresh evidences of it. Job has had close and intimate friends and relations, but the divine stroke has cut him off from them:

He has put my brothers far from me,
And those who knew me treat me as strangers.¹
My closest friends have failed me;
They who were intimate with me have forgotten me.
My visitors and maid-servants count me a stranger,
I have become a foreigner in their sight.
I call my servant and he answers not;
I must speak to him as a suppliant.
My breath is strange to my wife,
I must make supplication to my children. (19.13-17.)

Then one last futile appeal to the friends, and Job breaks out into words which form a definite landmark in the history of man's understanding of God:

I know that my Champion lives,
And shall rise on the dust hereafter,

¹ Or; 'are cruel to me'; so the Egyptian tradition.

And apart from my flesh I shall see God,
Whom I shall see for myself,
My own eyes shall see him, and not another's,
When my reins have utterly perished in my bosom.
(19.25-27.)

One or two points in the text call for special note. The first part of v. 26 is quite unintelligible in the present state of our knowledge. There is certainly no mention of worms or body; a very slight vowel change would enable us to read the first two words of the verse as 'After my awakening', but the next two, as they stand, can mean only something like 'they have struck (struck off, mutilated) this', with no indication as to the subject or the object, which cannot be the skin. We can only guess that in some way the poet's words formed a parallel to the second part of the verse, where the meaning is quite clear; the A.V. ('in my flesh') seems to render a different preposition.

The word rendered in the ordinary versions 'redeemer', and above 'champion', needs, probably, some explanation. It is a common term in the Old Testament, and our versions render it variously as 'redeemer' (the most frequent translation, especially in the later chapters of Isaiah), 'avenger', and 'kinsman', always with some approximation to the right sense. It implies a person who can and should take legal action for another who is incapable of doing so. Such duties will naturally fall on the nearest relatives, so we get the terms 'kinsman' and 'near kinsman', which play so large a part in the story of Ruth. A woman is usually unable to take a principal part in a business transaction, so she needs someone to act for her; again the story of Ruth

gives us a good example. A person who has fallen into poverty or even slavery has no means of relieving himself or of securing his liberty from his own resources or by his own efforts, hence he needs a 'redeemer'. Above all, a man who is dead can do nothing for himself. If he has no children, someone else must keep his family and name alive. If his property has been lost in whole or in part, someone else must recover it for those whom he has left behind. If he has died by violence, another person must fulfil the duty imposed by the *lex talionis*; in other words, must 'avenge' him.

Now here Job is looking forward to what can happen after he is dead. He realizes that there is no time for him to get his case settled during his life, and there is none who will now own him, even if one could be found with the power or the daring to take up a case against God. But he has already risen to the height of believing that God is other than men think, and will plead for him and secure his acquittal. But what is the use of that to Job when he is dead? If the God whom Job has discovered for himself is real and true, then in some way *there must be contact between the two after death*. Up to this point, death has been the final barrier between Job and his justification; now he can see beyond that barrier, and knows that in the end he will have satisfaction.

This is not a doctrine of immortality as the word is commonly understood. That is to say, there is no suggestion of an endless existence after death, an existence to which our earthly life is but a preliminary and preparation. Job has not looked so far; his immediate needs do not demand so extensive a view. All that concerns him is to know that death will not cut him off from God. The old belief in

Sheol might have been interpreted as a sort of immortality, in that it posited continued existence of a kind in which personal individuality was maintained. But for a man whose whole life and thought are centred on God that is valueless. What he must have, if existence is to be life, is some means of continuing the relationship between himself and that God who has been all in all to him, a need that is not to be satisfied in Sheol. Genuine immortality does not mean mere existence; it means existence in contact with God.

If, however, Job's newly found faith does not mean that this contact is to extend without limit, it is pivotal in man's spiritual history. The supreme barrier to a conception of eternal life, as we understand it, is the fact of death, which all must face. Till men see that death is no longer an impassable barrier, there can be no advance towards belief in full immortality. But when once it is seen that death is not the end, it is inevitable that the new life, as men conceive it, should extend indefinitely. So Job opened a door through which later generations could pass, and reach a picture of an eternal life which is a true counterpart of the eternal God. For personal contact with an eternal God must of necessity be itself eternal. It may not be an endless succession of experiences, for it may be existence in an order of being in which the time category has disappeared. But it is there in one form or another, and sooner or later the logic of Jesus will come home to man; God, the Eternal, is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; He is not the God of the dead but of the living, therefore these men, long since vanished from the earth, are still living, and will live as long as God Himself endures (Mark 12.26-27).

Neither is this a doctrine of resurrection, in the strict sense of the term. We have grown accustomed to thinking of the contrast between the Greek and the Hebrew views of man. To the former he is a soul temporarily imprisoned in a body, and immortality means endless life in a realm where he is liberated from this physical restraint. To the Hebrew, on the other hand, man is a body animated by a spirit, and to him immortality naturally means the restoration of that material element which is indispensable to his existence. The exact interpretation of this great passage has been, and still is, a matter on which opinions differ. The type of mind which instinctively thinks in terms of theology will explain it as an early form of a resurrection doctrine, or deny that it has any genuine reference to life after death. Those who would concentrate on the actual words, from the philological point of view, will insist that this is to discard the plain meaning of the text. Two facts stand out from the language employed. One is that Job knows he himself will stand in the presence of God, with no veil to hide Him. It would hardly be possible to emphasize this more strongly than is done in v. 27. Job has just said (end of v. 26) that he will see God, and he goes out of his way to insist that this is to be his own experience. It will not be done by proxy; there is no thought of a life continued in a man's posterity, and reaching God as it were vicariously. This is not the ordinary avenger, redeemer or kinsman, who takes office and does his work after the person most concerned has altogether passed away. It is Job, Job himself, who will come face to face with God and know that he has been vindicated by the supreme court of the universe.

Further, there can be no doubt as to the real meaning of

v. 27. The last clause contains the most conclusive and final word in the Hebrew language. 'Consumed' implies that a thing has absolutely and irrevocably ceased to be. There can be only one interpretation which satisfies this term: Job is contemplating some experience which will come to him after his physical frame has disintegrated altogether. We have the word again in Ps. 73.26, with the same thought behind it. Indeed, the whole of that Psalm forms an interesting parallel to the Book of Job. It, too, is concerned with the problem of suffering and the distribution of rewards and punishments. Its author also passed through fearful spiritual agony before he won his faith. There were differences between them; the Psalmist makes no direct reference to calamities which have befallen himself, and his poem lacks that note of challenge which is so prominent in Job's thought. There is, thus, a sense of a more affectionate intimacy between the man and his God. But he, too, reaches the conclusion that this friendship will not be ended by death. He goes further than Job and states his belief that it will last 'for ever'; this need not be our conception of infinite duration, but it means as long a time as man can contemplate.

The view held by both these writers failed to win general acceptance in Israel. This was almost certainly due to its stress on the non-physical nature of the life after death. In other words, it was far nearer to the Greek view of man and his destiny than to anything in normal Hebrew thought. But the root idea of life after death survived, and reappeared in the second century B.C. as a genuine doctrine of physical resurrection, only to be modified once more in Christian thought by St. Paul, who declared that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, and, while he used

the term 'body', employed it to indicate, not the material frame of man, but some co-ordinating centre of personal experience belonging to a world which completely transcends and, for man, supersedes the merely physical.

One more remark. Greece, like Israel, developed a doctrine of life after death. But, even in great expositions of the doctrine such as the *Phaedo*, we are conscious of a certain weakness. Socrates is strongly of opinion that he is right, but he leaves room for other views. This is partly because he has the philosophic mind, and partly because he bases his conclusions on his view of human nature. The Hebrew won a faith which admitted of no doubt or uncertainty, for his conviction was based on his understanding of the divine nature; he reached it through the necessities of his theology. While the Greek came to his conclusions through the study of man, the Hebrew won his faith by his knowledge of God.

From this point onwards there is a remarkable change in the tone of Job's speeches. The emotional tension slackens, and even the bitterness of the friends makes comparatively little impression on Job. Of course Job does not wholly ignore them, still less can he escape questions raised by his sufferings and the problem of meeting God. But in ch. 21 he is able, for the first time, to take a fairly calm and dispassionate view of the general problem. His personal question: is God his friend or his enemy? has found an answer which satisfies Job. The second question, which springs out of the first, can now be approached with some detachment, and Job goes on to seek an explanation of the age-long fact that prosperity and righteousness do not always go together, and that wickedness is not always met with an obvious punishment:

Why do the wicked live?

Advance in years, and gain great strength?

Their children are with them, well-established before them,

And their offspring is well seen by them.

Their houses are at peace, and know no fear,

The chastening staff of God falls not on them.

(21.7-9.)

Long life and the certainty of generations to come after them are the blessings most desired, and clearly Job feels the contrast with his own fate, though he does not refer to it expressly. Popular theology, as represented by the friends, declares that the sinner will always be punished, but does this really happen? At least it is not in fact an invariable rule:

How often is the lamp of the wicked quenched,

Does their fate come upon them,

Or pain take hold on them in his anger?¹

Are they as straw before the wind?

Does the tempest steal them away like chaff?

(21.17-18.)

The facts of experience do not harmonize with this doctrine; on the contrary there seems to be no difference in the treatment God metes out to the righteous and the wicked:

One dies in perfect strength,

He is wholly at ease and restful.

His pails are full of milk,

And the marrow of his bones is kept fresh.

¹ So the Egyptian tradition.

Another dies with a bitter heart;
He has had no share in the feast of good things.
They lie together in the dust,
And the worm covers them both. (21.23-26.)

We can almost catch the tones of Ecclesiastes, the man who found that there is no reward for goodness and no punishment for evil living since all must come to the same end. But Job has an experience which enables him to transcend this pessimism, for in goodness itself he has discovered a treasure of infinite value; goodness means the friendship of God.

The last speech of Eliphaz has some effect on Job, for in ch. 23 he returns again to the problem of how to find God:

Would that I knew where I might find him!
I would come to his dwelling-place.
I would set out my cause before him
I would speak in argument.
I would know the words in which he would answer me,
I would understand what he said to me.
Would he use his great strength in pleading against me?
No! he himself would attend to me.

Behold! I go eastwards, but he is not there,
Westwards, but I cannot discern him.
To the north, where he is at work,
I turn¹ to the south and see him not. (23.3-6, 8-9.)

And again Job is forced back on the actual experiences of life, and he sees a picture of tyranny and misery:

¹ So some ancient versions; Heb.: 'he turns'.

Some remove landmarks,
They pillage the flock and its shepherd.
They drive off the orphans' ass,
Take the widow's ox in pledge.
They thrust the poor from the path.
So the meek of the earth hide themselves together;
Behold! they are like wild asses in the wilderness,
They go forth to do what they may.

In the field they cut their fodder,
And glean the vineyard of the wicked.
All night they lie naked, without raiment,
They have no covering against the frost.
They are wet with the mountain storms,
And cling to the rock, for they have no shelter.
(24.2-5b, 6-8.)

So the picture is expanded, and we have before us, in vivid colours, these unfortunate victims of the wealthy tyrant. They have to work for the prosperous man; they carry his corn, while they themselves starve, and they have to tread his winepresses while they have no means of slaking their own thirst. We might again be reading denunciations made by Amos or Micah; evidently the habits of the plutocrat had changed little during the centuries.

The fragments we have of the last speeches in the debate proper have little to add, and we may pass on at once to Job's final challenge to God to appear and hear the case. It occupies chs. 29-31, and is in a sense a summary of the whole position. In ch. 29 Job gives a picture of what his life and standing had been in the days of his prosperity.

He dwells particularly on the universal respect with which all classes had regarded him :

Would that I were as in months of old,
In the days when God kept me;
When his lamp shone over my head,
In his light I walked through darkness,
As I was in my autumn days,
When the counsel of God was over my tent.
While the Almighty was still with me,
My children and servants were round me,
When my steps were washed with butter,
And the rock poured on me rivers of oil,
When I went forth to the city gate,
I would make my seat in the broad spaces.
Young men saw me, and hid themselves,
And old men rose to attend me.
Princes ceased to speak,
And laid their hand on their mouth. (29.2-9.)

It is interesting and significant to find that it is this aspect of his prosperous days which seems most important to Job. There is no mention of his wealth, of his flocks, herds, and slaves, no word of his children or of his own physical health. It is the position of honour which he had enjoyed among his fellows that now fills him with the deepest regrets and most sincere longings. Perhaps the reason is that Job feels he had deserved all this, that it was his character and conduct which had led to the respect and even reverence paid to him by high and low alike. For he goes on to record his acts of benevolence and justice :

For when the lowly appealed to me I saved him,
The orphan, and him that had no helper.
The blessing of the perishing came upon me,
And I made the heart of the widow break into a song
of joy.
I put on a garment of righteousness,
My justice was like a robe and a crown.
I was eyes to the blind,
I was feet to the lame,
I was a father to the poor,
I searched the cause of him whom I knew not;
I broke the fangs of the evil-doer,
I snatched the prey from his teeth. (29.12-17.)

Such a man certainly deserved well of his fellows, and it is worth noting that his conduct is a picture of the way in which a rich man might use his position in the eyes of ancient Israel. It did not follow that because a man was wealthy he was therefore wicked.

To-day all this is past, and ch. 30 is devoted to a lament over Job's present status and condition. Even the lowest of the people can afford to treat him with contempt:

But now they mock at me—
Those who are younger than I,
Men whose fathers I could spurn,
And put with the dogs of my flock.
What was the strength of their hands to me?
Those men whose rude vigour had perished.
They are worthless through want and famine,
They gnaw dry ground in darkness, ruin, and desolation.

They pluck mallow beside the bushes,
Their food is the root of the broom.
Men drive them from their midst,
Raise hue and cry against them as thieves.
They must dwell in the most dreadful of ravines,
In the cracks of the ground and of the rocks. (30.1-6.)

This is only one aspect of Job's troubles. His disease weighs heavily upon him, and though he has found a spiritual refuge in God, he still feels that his sufferings are a sign of divine anger unless they can be explained in a new way:

But now my soul pours itself out to torture me,
Days of affliction lay hold of me.
By night it bores through my bones and they fall from
me,
They that gnaw at me take no rest. (30.16, 17.)

I cry to thee, but thou dost not answer,
I take my stand, but thou dost not¹ attend to me.
Thou art turned into my cruel persecutor,
With all thy being thou dost hate me.
Thou liftest me up to the wind, and makest me ride upon
it,
Thou dost dissolve me into the roar of the storm.
I know thou wilt bring me back to death,
That trysting-place of all that live. (30.20-23.)

There, then, is the actual situation. Job has portrayed

¹ So one ancient version; omitted in most Hebrew MSS.

the facts, the disaster which has taken from him all that made life worth living for him, and the sense that it is God who has brought all this upon him. Surely he is entitled to some explanation? God is wholly just, in the ethical sense as well as in the forensic. The actual loss and suffering which Job endures are as nothing compared with the spiritual anguish of the unsolved problem. It is God who has implanted in men like Job a sense of right and wrong; it is God Himself who now seems to be violating His own law. There must be some reason, and that very moral capacity which God has bestowed on Job gives him the right to ask questions of his Creator. One reason for such treatment would be in harmony with what Job already knows of God: this treatment might be the punishment for heinous sin. That, however, Job maintains, is excluded by the facts. He has never been guilty of deeds which could deserve such frightful vengeance, even from a perfectly good God. So he closes his appeal with a great oath of purgation, in which he enumerates the sins of which the friends have accused him and others which might have been committed by a man in the position Job had once enjoyed. There are, too, statements of positive well-doing; Job's conduct has been marked not merely by negative virtue, abstention from wrong, but by positive and active benevolence. The result is that we have here a standard of moral conduct which is unequalled in the Old Testament, and comes nearer to the teaching of Jesus on this matter than anything else in the Bible.

An ethical system must take into account the natural relations of a man to those who are round him. First, then, Job speaks of sexual morality:

I made a covenant with my eyes,
That I would not let my thoughts dwell on a virgin.
What is the portion assigned by God from above?
And the inheritance given by the Almighty from on high?
Is it not ruin for the evil-doer?
Calamity for those that work iniquity?
Does not he see my ways,
And count all my steps?
If I have walked with iniquity,
And my foot has sped to deceit,
Let him weigh me in just scales,
And let God know my perfection. (31.1-6.)

This is a general statement, of which the first verse is only one example, to which Job will return again. The next specific sin which he has avoided is that of receiving bribes, an offence which is only too common in the East, ancient and modern :

If my steps have turned from the way,
If my heart has followed my eyes,
If aught has clung to my palm,
Then let me sow for another to eat,
Let my produce be rooted out. (vv. 7-8.)

Next he disclaims adultery, and calls down on himself the curse that if he is guilty, his wife shall be treated as he has dealt with the wife of another (vv. 9-12).

He has always dealt fairly with his slaves :

If I spurned the cause of my slave,
Or my female slave when they complained against me,

What could I do when God arose?

How could I answer when he visited me?

Did not he that made me in the womb make him
also?

Did not the same God fashion us in the belly?

(vv. 13-15.)

Here is a position which is almost unique in the ancient world. There is no room for a doctrine of the inferior being who is a slave by nature. There is no room for social distinctions or for racial discrimination. Job has risen to a height far above that of much in our modern world. There are no grades of humanity, whether due to colour, financial standing, nationality, or any other cause. When we stand in view of our infinite Maker, we must all be equally insignificant, and of equal value in His sight. Job has fully recognized this. The mere fact that these people are in subordination to him by common law and custom does not give him the right to ignore their human status. If they think that they have reason to charge their master with wrongdoing, he must grant to them that same right to a fair hearing that he himself would expect from his equals. He must abandon any privileges which law and custom allow him, and treat the matter impartially. If he is in the wrong, if they can prove their case, then he must admit the fact and make what amends may be in his power. To some extent the Israelite codes admitted certain rights to the slave, but Job goes far beyond anything to be found in Exodus or Deuteronomy. After all, the master might be the judge as well, and, except in flagrant and obvious cases like injury causing mutilation, it would be difficult for a slave to secure a verdict against him, even in open court.

But Job has never let a matter go so far; he himself has always been the impartial tribunal which will award the slave his rights. And all this because he recognizes the common service of all human beings. Not till St. Paul do we meet with so clear a pronouncement on the equal rights of all men created by God.

The next subject which Job introduces is that of active benevolence. Almsgiving has always been accounted one of the pious duties in the East, where the social structure normally makes no provision for the helpless. Job has never failed to feed the starving or clothe the naked when their need became known to him. If he has neglected this duty, which has been imposed on him by his fear of God, may his arm fall from his shoulder (vv. 16-23).

Job has been a rich man, but he has never made money his god (vv. 24-25), or trusted to it. We may notice that all through this last great speech the loss of property in itself, apart from its social consequences, seems to have troubled him very little; this is, apparently, the only reference, and it disclaims any particular value set on wealth.

Job is represented (with some phrases which suggest deviation from the general picture) as a rich member of a Beduin group. For dwellers in the desert, the sun, moon and stars are of primary importance, and regulate their life. There is, then, normally a tendency to accept them as deities, and this form of cult is widely spread. But Job has never allowed himself to be led astray by their splendour or by their usefulness as guides in the wilderness or indications of changing seasons. That, he feels, would have been a denial of the truth, and an attempt to deceive God above (vv. 26-28).

Job has had enemies. Yet he has never been bitter to

them, and even when disaster overtook them, he has uttered no word of satisfaction, or allowed himself to gloat over their misery. There can be few who have not felt a mild glow of pleasure, or at least of relief, on hearing that some evil has befallen one who had done them wrong. But even of this Job has never been guilty (vv. 29-30).

The duty of hospitality is among the foremost of the moral responsibilities in a society which is not fully organized. In the patriarchal narratives of Genesis the rule is recognized by good men like Abraham and Lot, but is neglected and even violated by the wicked, such as the men of Sodom. Job himself is among the patriarchs in spirit and in economic life, and he has never allowed the traveller to sleep out of doors or failed to open his tent to the wayfarer (vv. 31-32). And, finally, he has avoided the common inclination to conceal his own mistakes and faults. He has always been open, and admitted his errors (vv. 33-34).

So here is the statement of integrity with which Job would come before God. He has emphasized every item by an imprecation, calling down some peculiar disaster on himself if his words are not true. He is ready, and all that remains is that God Himself should appear and answer the summons, either giving Job a verdict, or showing some unsuspected sin which has justified all that he has endured. But Job himself has no doubts of the issue:

Would that I had one to hear me,

Here is my mark, let the Almighty answer me,

Would I had the charge which my adversary has
written against me!

I would surely raise it on my shoulder,

Bind it as a diadem upon me.

I would tell the number of my steps,

As a chieftain I would draw near unto him. (vv. 35-37.)

So the words of Job end with this final challenge to God to appear.

VI

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

AND God does appear. It is clear that the old story ended with a theophany. As the friends and Job debated the matter, clouds gathered and suddenly a great tempest broke over them. Out of the tempest came the voice of Yahweh, as it had come in the days of Israel's wanderings. This detail has been preserved by the poet, who further suggests reliance on the old story by using the divine name Yahweh. But, as in the human dialogue, nothing Yahweh said in the old tale has been preserved, and the speeches assigned to Him are those put into His mouth by the poet.

The opening words ascribed to God are not calculated to give Job confidence. God has accepted the challenge, but the challenger will have to take the consequences, and the first effect is to make Job conscious of his own weakness and ignorance:

Who is this that darkens counsel,
With words but without knowledge?
Gird up thy loins like a man,
And let me ask questions for thee to answer.
Where wast thou when I founded the earth?
Tell me, if thou hast knowledge and understanding.

Who determined its measurement?—surely thou knowest that?

Or who stretched out the line over it?

To what base were its foundations sunk?

Or who laid its corner-stone?

When the morning stars sang together,

And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

And he shut the sea in with bars,

When it burst forth as a babe from the womb.

When I appointed the cloud its covering,

And the thick gloom its swaddling-bands. (38.2-9.)

At one point in his struggle towards a faith Job has said that he is willing either to take the initiative and to ask questions of God or else to allow God to cross-examine, for he will be prepared for any question (13.22). God has taken him at his word, and has chosen the role of questioner. But He seems to make no attempt to deal with the points Job would like to raise; the questions are certainly not such as he could have expected. For they are not concerned with Job's sorrows, with his complaints, or with any iniquities he may have committed. They appear to be leading up to a fresh challenge; has Job any right to demand an explanation? We may go further; if any solution were propounded for the problem, could he understand or appreciate it? It may well be that the new truth is for ever beyond the grasp of a finite mind, and the first impression made on Job by his actual contact with God must be that he is in the presence of a Being who is immeasurably greater than anything the little human mind had believed possible.

That impression is strengthened by every word God says.

He runs over the whole range of the material world, the phenomena of day and night, snow and hail, storm, dew and frost. In each case Job is challenged to give an answer, and again and again we hear the sarcastic parenthesis, 'Declare, for thou knowest it!' God turns to the heavens, and asks for an explanation of the great constellations. Then to the wild life upon earth, and the sustenance of lions, ravens, and wild goats. Man may have some knowledge and some control where the domestic animals are concerned, but what can he do with the wild ass and the wild ox, or with the silly ostrich, whose habits seem to have been somewhat changed during the course of centuries. Finally Job is bidden contemplate two magnificent creatures, the war-horse (horses were seldom used except in war) and the eagle. All this leads to the question in which God sums up His point:

To think that a fault-finder should plead against the Almighty!

Or one that reasons with him give an answer! (40.2.)

What can Job say? It is impossible to read these last two chapters without an overwhelming sense of the insignificance of man in God's presence. And that is all that Job can feel; there is nothing left for him but complete self-abasement:

Behold! I am of no account; how can I answer thee?

I lay my hand on my mouth.

Once I spoke, but I cannot answer thee;

Twice, but I will speak no more. (40.4-5.)

But God does not leave the matter there. Job has been reduced to utter humility, if not humiliation, and is now in a state when he can listen to the real statement of God. Hitherto he has simply been confronted with omnipotence and made to feel his own insignificance; now he is to receive final judgement on the whole matter. Yahweh begins His second speech with the same words as those He had used in opening the first; is this a legal formula of the Israelite courts?

Gird up thy loins like a man,
And let me ask questions for thee to answer.
Wilt thou nullify my cause?
Make me guilty that thou mayest be in the right?
Hast thou such an arm as God's?
Canst thou thunder with a voice like his?
Deck thyself with magnificence and majesty;
Clothe thyself with splendour and glory?
Scatter abroad the furious shafts of thy anger,
See every one that is proud, and bring him low?
Look on every one that is proud, and make him stoop,
Tread down the wicked where they stand,
Hide them in the dust together,
Bind up their faces and hide them?
Then I will acknowledge thee,
For thy own right hand shall give thee victory.
(40.7-14.)

God is omnipotent; that has to be admitted. It follows, to the oriental mind, that He is also irresponsible; there is no power above Him, no law to which others may appeal, for all law is the expression of His own will. From Him

there is no appeal and none can challenge His words or actions. Job has utterly failed to appreciate his own position in relation to God, and he must be brought to realize where he stands. Only one whose power was equal to that of God could claim the right to challenge Him.

God is not only absolute power; He is also absolute justice. In both senses of the term, ethical and forensic, God is always right. By definition, justice will be one aspect of the divine will, and it is inconceivable that any lower being should attempt to challenge it. He is also certain to win if any other be so arrogant as to oppose Him. Omnipotence and absolute justice are so closely linked with one another that they cannot be distinguished; if the former is once admitted, the latter will follow as a matter of course.

Now this is very much what the friends have said. They have insisted again and again on the truth that God is all-powerful, and that the best and greatest of men is of no value as compared with Him. Bildad, in particular, has brought before Job the truth that it is hopeless for man even to think of challenging God to legal argument. But the only impression he and the other two have made on Job is to rouse him and strengthen his determination to find God and thrash the case out with Him. At last Job himself has taken the attitude which they have so strongly recommended to him; he has fallen before the feet of God in utter submission. He has had his way; he has heard the authentic voice of God, and has been proved to be in the wrong. All his defences have broken down, and the victory of God, moral and legal, is complete and absolute.

What is it that has produced this change? We may omit the descriptions of the two great beasts, the hippopotamus and the crocodile, and pass on at once to the beginning of

ch. 42; even if original they add nothing to the force of God's statement. Job gives his answer to the second speech of Yahweh (42.4-6):

I know that thou canst do all things,
That no thought can be withheld from thee.¹
Therefore I declared that which I did not understand,
Things too marvellous for me, which I knew not.
Hear, and I will speak;
I will ask thee, and do thou tell me.²
I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear,
But now my eye sees thee;
Therefore I am utterly melted and repent,
Upon dust and ashes.

That is the answer to our question. As long as a doctrine is propounded only by men, however saintly, learned, or positive they may be, it is possible to challenge it, even though its champions claim that it comes from God. But when once a man stands face to face with God, and realizes for himself what God is like, then all argument is futile. It is the direct experience of God that is effective, not the evidence of men concerning Him.

At first sight it looks as if the poet had simply abandoned his case, and led us nowhere. At the same time it should be observed that in God's judgement there is no support for the theological position of the friends on the relation between sin and suffering. God is no more concerned to justify them than He is to argue with Job; to all He is the

¹ Our text inserts a repetition of 38.2, with the change of the word for 'darken'; probably the sentence is out of place here.

² This verse may be a later insertion; if it is original, it will be Job's confession of what he has said without understanding or knowledge.

one omnipotent Deity. To this extent the friends are not declared to be in the right.

But there is another fact to be borne in mind. This poem is not a mere philosophical or theological discussion; it is a record of experience. Job has had these doubts, questions, spiritual tortures, and has found a great faith in union with God after death; here again is a position, taken by Job, on which God passes no condemnation. He has done more; he has in some way come face to face with God Himself. In that experience he has won a true perspective. He has seen God as He is, and he has seen himself. The double vision has come with a clarity which leaves no room for doubt or uncertainty. It is the climax of his spiritual history, and completely grips and controls him. He is an Oriental, and to him the cult of omnipotence is the natural form of religion; given that and he has no more to ask. But it must be a direct conviction, not a second-hand doctrine imposed by human authority; immediate experience, and that alone, will bring a man into his true relation with God.

But what of Job's problem? God has not said a word about it, and Job himself is satisfied to leave the matter without further mention. Once again, the overwhelming experience of direct contact with God has left no room for a problem. God being what Job has seen Him to be, there must be a solution, and that is enough. It does not matter that Job should get an answer to his question; it does not matter that he should be able to grasp the answer if he had it. He has been in the direct presence of God, and that experience leaves no room for anything else. The problem may remain as an intellectual exercise, but it can no longer touch the sufferer's heart or repeat the torture through which

Job has gone. He has seen God, and his soul needs no more.

In a sense, Job is one of the most modern books in the Old Testament. Its characters still live amongst us, and its problems still demand a solution. Countless men and women, faced with trouble, still cry out 'What have I done to deserve this?' and too often fail to reach an answer. The problem of suffering is still the greatest intellectual obstacle to religious faith.

Of course the Christian Gospel has made real advance with the question, and has, perhaps, brought us as near to a solution as a finite mind can ever hope to come. It may be that in the course of time God may yet reveal a higher stage of truth in Christ than has yet been within the reach of man. But even now one thing is certain, and goes far to mitigate the stress of the problem. The Incarnation and the Crucifixion, especially the latter, have shewn us beyond dispute or doubt that suffering is not merely a human experience; it is also divine. When once we have seen in that tortured frame, and heard in that last despairing cry of desolation the very heart of God Himself, we know that we can take our stand on at least one firm spot. For if He whom we recognize as the universal Creator, the Lord of history, the Ruler of mankind, can endure pain beyond all man's imagination, then there must be a meaning in it. In that faith we may rest.

In the direct presence of God, Job was no longer conscious of his problem; he had no room for anything but the Almighty. So we find that when we have really seen Him, as He has revealed Himself on Calvary, our own problems cease to cause us that deep anguish of spirit which we have shared with Job. For the Cross is not merely an event in

the world of time and space; it is evidence of an eternal fact in the heart and experience of God. He is always just like that. And there is far more here than Job could ever see. To him, God was supreme and universal power; once again this is characteristic of the oriental mind. He is also supreme intelligence; repeatedly He has challenged Job on the score of his knowledge and understanding, and has shown that the mere human mind is as far short of the divine as mere human power is insignificant in comparison with that of God. Power and intelligence; if we have no more, we are left with what the poet calls 'an isoscele, deficient in the base'. Our triangle becomes equilateral only when we give to love at least the same magnitude as we give to the other two qualities. And if we want to see the love of God we must turn to its supreme expression in the sacrifice made by God the Son Himself. Like Job we must recognize the infinite majesty and splendour of divine revelation, and fall before it in complete humility and self-surrender. Then, and only then, can we reach security of spirit, and know that our problems, even the worst of them, do but touch our minds. We are right to give them still our attention and our thought, but they must not, indeed they cannot, touch the hidden depths of the spiritual life. For, standing at the foot of the Cross, reaching thereby a valid moral union with Him who is supreme Power and supreme Intelligence, we find also, and above all, that in Him we have known, as a fact of our own experience, supreme Love.